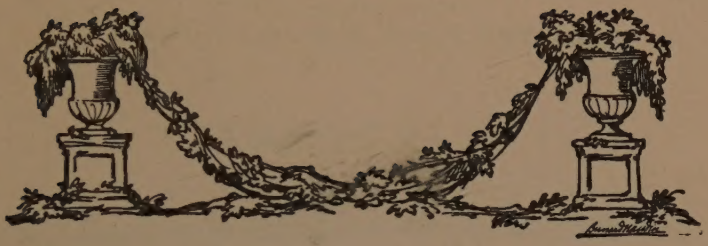
GEORGE ELIOT

After a drawing by Frederic Burton

GEORGE ELIOT—1864



George Eliot

By

J. LEWIS MAY

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PREFACE

It is said that George Eliot is not very widely read nowadays, that the author of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss,* who for years was regarded as one of the greatest of English novelists, has fallen from her high estate. Certainly, after the death of Thackeray and Dickens there was left no writer whose reputation among the critics, or whose popularity with the public was at all commensurate with hers. But now . . .

Great writers are apt to suffer these vicissitudes of fortune. They are not immune, even the most illustrious of them, from the caprice of changing fashion and altered conditions of life. In an age of iconoclasts, their very greatness is an invitation, an incitement to those who would attract attention to themselves and gain a facile notoriety by decrying the heroes of a former generation. In an age in which Shakespeare himself, to say nothing of Scott and Dickens, is no longer looked on as sacrosanct, it would be surprising to find that George Eliot had wholly escaped such unflattering attentions. The truth is, however, that George Eliot has been the object not so much of attack as of neglect—a far worse fate. Attack inevitably provokes counter-attack, and in such a process

some of her shining qualities would have assuredly been brought to light as well for the benefit of her own reputation as for the profit of the world at large.

It is the aim of this study to recount the salient incidents of a very notable life and to draw attention to the beauty and value of the works produced in the course of it, works that have been suffered to remain too long in an unmerited penumbra.

Whether or not the time be opportune for such an attempt at resuscitation is perhaps open to question. Despite the multiplicity of books which pour, in an incessant and ever increasing flood, from a thousand printing presses up and down the land, it may be doubted whether this is a reading age. Mr. Arnold Bennett—and there is no better judge—declared with emphasis the other day that, to its shame, it certainly is *not*. I think he even went so far as to call it an illiterate age. But, after all, we must not be too hard on our fellow men. "The child is father of the man," and the man himself is still a child. He likes new toys, and this is an age of toys. Motor-cars, the "wireless," aeroplanes, the cinema,—never was there such an abundance, or such a variety of playthings to dazzle the eye of the grown-up child withal. He will be engrossed with them for a while and think of nothing else, and then after a time the novelty will wear off, and childlike, he will grow a little weary of toys. And when

at length the pensive mood is upon him he will, perhaps, bethink him of his books and take it into his head to sit quietly in a corner—*in angulo cum libello*—and read and dream a little. And the books he will choose will not necessarily, nor even preferably, be new books, because the new books will all talk about that world of which he is growing just a shade weary. Rather will he take down old ones that will tell of the world as it was in his father's or his grandfather's day or "in the old time before them," books that will tell him of a world which is passed and gone and is, for that very reason perhaps, dearer and more beautiful than the world he sees. Then it will be—and the time may not be far distant—that he will assuredly take down from his shelves some of the books of George Eliot—some, but not all. . . .

GEORGE ELIOT

George Eliot

CHAPTER I

MANY years ago I went to Paris with a friend, a Parisian who loved his city with a proud and passionate devotion, with a zeal and an ardor that lent fire to his speech and wings to his feet. Day after day, from morning till night, I followed in his steps, footsore and weary, down interminable boulevards, visiting every "monument," threading the narrow streets and byways of Old Paris, exploring every court and alley. And because I saw so much, there remained in my memory but a blur of light and color and movement. Only one thing stood—and stands —out clearly in my mental vision, and that is the bough of an aged tree drooping a mass of fresh green foliage over the crumbling edge of an old gray wall, like a foaming torrent of emerald stayed by enchantment in its headlong fall. It was some peaceful backwater in the Quartier Latin. A deserted street, a crumbling wall, a mist of green on an aged bough, sunlight and silence,—such are the things which, out of all the impressive

splendors I had seen, lived on most vividly in my recollection. Even now, after many years, it all seems so bright and clear, so still and unearthly, that I sometimes wonder whether the whole thing were not a dream and whether I ever did indeed behold that scene, with my bodily eye.

As with places, so it is with books. A single scene, a single episode, and that, maybe, not of the most important, stands out in our memory clear and solitary like a token or symbol of the whole.

Thus, at least for me, the name *Esmond* does not set my mind running on the successive incidents of that enchanting story; I do not think of it as a whole, unless indeed, I consciously address myself to the task, but just of two episodes: Lady Castlewood's meeting with the lonely little Henry Esmond in the Book-room or Yellow Gallery at Castlewood Hall, with the sun making a golden halo round her hair; and that later episode which it would take a hard-hearted man to read, were it for even the twentieth time, without tears—the scene in which the Duke of Hamilton haughtily forbids his affianced Beatrix to accept Esmond's present of the diamond necklace, on the ground that he has no right to the name he bears, when Lady Castlewood intervenes and tells the story of Esmond's noble renunciation of his title.

So with many another romance, a fragment of dialogue or portraiture or description is, as it were, the index figure, the hieroglyphic, behind which the whole work lies stored in the mind. In *Adam Bede,* for example, of all the scenes and events recorded in that beautiful and tragic tale, it is one of the most seemingly trivial that steals into my mind when I hear the book mentioned: not the pregnant utterances of Mrs. Poyser, not the meeting of Hetty and Arthur in the wood, nor the scene in the prison—not any of these things, but the moist fragrance of the rectory garden when the rain had ceased and the skies had cleared and the sun shone out after that morning of wind and rain when Parson Irwine had stayed indoors and played a game of chess with that stately old lady, his mother. Who that has walked in such a garden, after rain, and seen how "the great Provence roses had been cruelly tossed by the wind and beaten by the rain, and all the delicate-stemmed border flowers had been dashed down and stained with the wet soil" could be insensible to the memories that such a description conjures up? It is in these pictures she draws of a vanished England, of England in the days before the coming of the railroad and the electric telegraph, that George Eliot stands supreme; and for those old enough to recall some vestiges of these scenes and modes of life she so tenderly portrays, ere yet

the clop-clop of horses' hoofs had given place to the whir of the motor and the screech of the klaxon, her writings can never lose their charm. How they will fare with those to whom such things are not even a memory is another matter. How many, for example, of the present generation have any understanding of what Tennyson means when, in *Maud,* speaking of the guests who had been dancing at the Hall, he wrote:

> Now half to the setting moon are gone,
> And half to the rising day;
> Low on the sand and loud on the stone
> The last wheel echoes away.

Those who have been entertaining their friends at a country house, and waved farewell to them as the carriage moved away down the gravel drive and waiting till they heard in the stillness of the night the rattle of the wheels on the hard macadam, have turned to one another and said, "Ah, they are out on the road now," listening till the echoes died away into silence—these would know well enough the meaning of

> Low on the sand and loud on the stone

but they belong to a generation almost passed away; and the day will come when the meaning of these lines will be dimly apprehended by the diligent student through

the laborious commentaries of some dry-as-dust archeologist.

There was something appropriate and, as it were, symbolical about the place of George Eliot's birth. It was itself a green sanctuary of quiet loveliness; "Arbury Park," says a descriptive writer of to-day, "maintains a bulwark of greenery against the black world of the collier, and Astley with its ancient church and moated castle amid the trees seems to belong so completely to a world apart, that it is hardly thinkable that two or three miles off, men are going down into the pits by shifts, night and day."[1] In the same way as her birthplace stands thus near the frontier of the clean pure country and the unlovely squalor of the mining village, so her life was cast as it were upon the watershed of the Old Order and the New, and the ridge of Time that sunders the England of stage-coaches and hand labor in the fields, from the England of railways and mechanical industrialism.

In the last resort, the abiding influence of any imaginative writer, especially of the novelist, resides in the personality we may discern behind the writing. Ingeniously constructed plots, brilliant and convincing dialogues, vivid descriptions, clever philosophy and I know

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[1] *Unknown Warwickshire*, by M. Dormer Harris, The Bodley Head Ltd., p. 180.

not what,—all these things, excellent and necessary though they be, are of no lasting importance unless they are informed, quickened and made human, so to speak, by the personality of the writer. Mere cleverness, superficial brilliance, showy smartness and cynicism, these attributes are common enough. They may captivate the attention for a time, but they fade and die away and are as completely forgotten as the foam that sparkles for a moment on the crest of a wave and then disappears for ever.

Long after one has read and closed the covers upon a novel of George Eliot, when one's memory of the incidents and descriptions recorded therein grows vague and dim, there remains something that does not fade and that is the feeling that one has been passing one's time in the company of a winning and gifted personality. No one was more opposed to this theory of the matter than Flaubert who set himself to eliminate his own personality from all he wrote. No one proved more conclusively the impossibility of such a suppression than Flaubert himself. Take *Madame Bovary* and open it where you will, the impress, the accent, the movement, the very voice and countenance of its author are apparent on every page, nay, in every sentence. So it is with all great writers inevitably. Their work survives because of the living personality that inhabits it. This

it is, the ever-present, shadowing, enveloping personality of the writer, that lends to his work its permanent and abiding charm.

So with George Eliot. We look upon the world and the people she portrays through her eyes. We share, or at all events understand, her predilections and her prejudices. She is truly creative. She creates not only her world and its inhabitants, she creates in us the power to see that world and to recognize its reality, its truth. That she had faults of style, faults of character no one will deny. Like Wordsworth, she too often exhibits a pathetically complacent satisfaction with work of marked inferiority. She wrote verse, and a great deal of it with which she was well pleased; but none of it is poetry. She wrote *The Mill on the Floss* which will live for ever. She wrote *Theophrastus Such,* which never lived at all. She had faults which she grew out of, and faults which she grew into—perhaps after all they were one and the same—but these are as invisible specks in the sun of her glory. George Eliot is England in the same sense, if not in the same degree, as Shakespeare is England. Those whom fate has exiled, even those of English stock—dwellers beyond the sea—who, when they speak of Home, mean England, though they have never set foot on English soil, can yet gaze upon her countenance, her fields and woods and rivers, in the pages of

Adam Bede, and *Silas Marner,* and *The Mill on the Floss.* Changes swift and manifold have come upon us since those books were written. Nevertheless the English character is in its essentials unaltered. Nor has the face of England been marred beyond recognition—not yet. The day may come when, if we would gaze upon the beauties of which a ruthlessly mechanical age has robbed us, we shall find them only in pictures or in books. If so, then nowhere shall we discover a truer or lovelier presentment of them than in the pages of George Eliot.

CHAPTER II

THE inmates of South Farm, Arbury, in the county of Warwickshire, had been very early astir on the morning of that twenty-second of November, 1819; for at five o'clock, an event of considerable importance had occurred there: Mistress Robert Evans the second had been brought to bed of her third child, a daughter, Mary Ann, who was afterward to be known to fame as George Eliot. Robert Evans, her father, was held in high esteem throughout the country, not least perhaps because of his great personal strength. While two of his workmen were waiting one day for a third to help them carry a ladder to a neighboring rick, Robert Evans picked it up, and to the wonder and admiration of the two spectators, bore it off unaided and placed it in the required position. On another occasion when a woman on a stage-coach complained that her neighboring passenger, a sailor, was showing himself over-liberal in his attentions toward her, Robert Evans changed places with her and, collaring the incontinent mariner—a burly enough fellow—by the scruff of the neck, held him in an iron grip under the seat till the end of the journey.

Such achievements were well calculated to impress themselves on the imagination, particularly on the feminine imagination, and may afford a clue as to the reason which induced Miss Christiana Pearson, who came of a family of substantial yeomen in the district, to ally herself with one who was not only her inferior in the social scale but a widower with two encumbrances—a boy, Robert, and a girl, Frances Lucy—into the bargain. But Robert, the father, possessed qualities, more enduring, if less spectacular, than his muscular prowess. He had brains as well as brawn—and not only brains but a resolute yet modest determination to make the most of them. That is to say, he had character. His father, George Evans, had been a builder and carpenter in the parish of Norbury in the county of Derby. Robert was brought up to the business and some time afterward moved to Ellastone in Staffordshire. Thence, about 1799, he migrated to Kirk Hallam in Derbyshire where he rented a farm from Mr. Francis Newdigate whose agent he became. His affairs prospered, as well they might, for he was one man in a thousand, as Francis Newdigate was quick to recognize. He had a wonderful eye for timber and could tell you, "as near as made no odds" how much usable timber there was in a standing tree. Without possessing that handicap which is considered necessary to the calling in these days, name-

ly a diploma, "letters after his name," he established a reputation as a first-rate valuer. And because he was so skilful and of unimpeachable probity, his services as arbitrator were constantly in request. Small wonder then that when, on the death of old Sir Roger Newdigate, Francis Newdigate came into a life interest in the Arbury Estates, he, Francis, should engage the indispensable Robert to accompany him thither.

At Arbury, Robert became tenant of South Farm and continued his duties as agent with such zeal and success that he secured the good will and support of Colonel Newdigate of Astley Castle, Francis Newdigate's son, through whom he became agent to Lord Aylesford, Lord Lifford and Mr. Bromley Davenport. Estate management is a responsible and exacting task, and this pluralist must have had his work cut out, considering he had his own farm to tend. He was clearly a rising man; he was certainly a personable one. It was therefore, as we have hinted, no wonder that Miss Christiana Pearson condescended to relieve his loneliness—his first wife, Harriott Poynton, had died in 1809, leaving him with the two children, Robert and Frances Lucy, before mentioned—and in her turn to bear him three more: Christiana, Isaac and Mary Ann.

These Pearsons were a fine family. Shrewd, utterly honest, hard-working, thrifty and very stiff-necked,

they embodied and exemplified the best traditions of English yeomanry. Nowadays, when so many landowners have acquired their acres out of the profits accruing to them from trade or successful dealings on the Stock Exchange, the yeomen are the best representatives of the real aristocracy of the soil. Whether or not their ancestors drew the bow at Crécy or at Agincourt, they, like the immemorial oaks and elms, have drawn their sustenance, for generation after generation, from the soil on which they dwell, and somehow that seems a worthier mode of gaining a livelihood than speculating in tallow or even in gold. But this is to digress. The Pearsons then were a family highly respected in the neighborhood and "a cut or two above," if one may use the expression, a man who was, not to put too fine a point upon it, a mere artizan, a carpenter and stonemason who had risen to be a farmer.

Life on a farm in the days of King George the Fourth was not the exciting thing it is now. A farm was a world in itself. If the farmer "listened in"—which he seldom gave himself time to do—it was not to a vaudeville performance relayed from a Blackpool music-hall, but to the piping of the birds in summer or the roar of the gale in winter, the former of which he probably heeded not at all, and the latter only to wonder whether it would take the roof off his barns. There were no

railways, no penny-post, and a newspaper was as rare as the green bustard.

The great event of the day at Arbury was the passing of the coach bearing the mails of his Majesty the First Gentleman in Europe between Birmingham and Stamford. Two coaches passed daily—one from Birmingham at ten o'clock in the morning, the other from Stamford at three o'clock in the afternoon. "We can imagine," says J. W. Cross in his *Life of George Eliot*, "the excitement of a little four-year-old girl and her seven-year-old brother waiting on bright frosty mornings to hear the far-off ringing beat of the horses' feet upon the hard ground, and then to see the gallant appearance of the four greys, with coachman and guard in scarlet, outside passengers muffled up in furs, and baskets of game and other packages hanging behind the boot, as his Majesty's mail swung cheerily round on its way from Birmingham to Stamford." It is, one supposes, the subconscious influence of the Christmas-card artist that leads one to visualize a coach so often in a winter landscape. But it would harmonize with its surroundings equally well at any time of the year. Moreover, as the farm gates stand at a sharp bend of the road between Coventry and Nuneaton, the expectant children may have heard, not only the ringing beat of the horses' feet on the hard ground, but the music of the horn, as the

crimson-clad guard startled the echoes with the three-noted warning.

At least one of George Eliot's biographers speaks of the scenery of this part of Warwickshire with some disparagement. "The landscape," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "is not precisely stimulating:" . . . the scenery, a monotonous succession of little ups and downs, is of a kind which owes its interest to its subordination to human society. In George Eliot's writings, there are proofs enough of sensibility to natural beauty, but the scenery is a background to the actors; and there is no indication of such a passion for her native district as Scott felt for his "honest gray hills." Is there no such indication? For my part, I see every indication. If your childhood and youth are passed in a given place however unromantic to the adult eye, it is a land of enchantment to the youthful vision; it matters little whether it be Enfield or the Engadine, in a back garden in a London suburb a child may find as many fairies and more than in the most tourist-haunted beauty spot in *Baedeker,* if only it be *home.* A single tree on a hillside, a fold of the hills, however humdrum to the superior eye the "environment" may be, can, though perhaps you know it not, influence you more deeply and more permanently, than the most imposing panorama viewed, in after life, through the discriminating and unimaginative eye

of manhood. One must beware of judging these things with the critical objective eye of the tourist, be he never so cultured. The Kingdom of God is within us and "heaven lies about us in our infancy."

England, then, George Eliot's England, was a passion to her, and the thoughts of it are inwoven in the very fibers of her being. J. W. Cross comes nearer the truth than Sir Leslie Stephen, and scanned more truly the secrets of her heart and mind. "There are," he acknowledges, "neither hills nor vales—no rivers, lakes, or sea—nothing but a monotonous succession of green fields and hedgerows, with some fine trees. The only water to be seen is the 'brown canal.' The effect of such a landscape on an ordinary observer is not inspiring, but 'effective magic is transcendent nature;' and with her transcendent nature George Eliot has transfigured these scenes, dear to midland souls, into many an idyllic picture, known to those who know her books." This is the truth, or not far from it. Not only the "sounding cataract," but even the "brown canal," may "haunt you like a passion." In this homely unobtrusive midland scenery, it was not only "the tops of the elms" but "the buttercups and the little wayside vetches" that influenced her heart.

It is not always easy to trace the effect of parental influence on the child. *Prima facie* conclusions must be

viewed with distrust. If the parent thinks one way, the child, if it be of an independent nature, will often think the other—at least superficially. Anatole France's father, for example, was a Royalist and a Catholic. His son called himself a Socialist and a freethinker. Nominally he was. That is the label under which he passes. But labels are often deceptive, and Anatole France, as more than one critic has come to see, was, in his heart, much more of an aristocrat and a conservative than the world—or he himself—believed. No one could describe George Eliot as a Tory; but J. W. Cross speaks of her latent conservative bias and she herself confesses that, though given to "meditative if not active innovation," she was not sorry that her father "was a Tory who had not exactly a dislike to innovators and dissenters, but a slight opinion of them as persons of ill-founded self-confidence."

Robert Evans, her father, now a man of forty-six, had flourished, as the saying goes, when the French Revolution had seemed pregnant with the promise of some millennial dawn.

Perhaps at last the human race was about to emerge from the darkness of tyranny and injustice in which it has hitherto been involved in its struggle toward the light, and *"Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"* was the battle-cry that should usher first France and then the

rest of the peoples, into the serene and glorious day of the Universal Brotherhood of Man.

If some such hopes had inspired the more thoughtful and the more sanguine among the spectators of the great political drama, they were doomed to swift extinction. The social and political organism of France had been melted in the fiery crucible of the Revolution; it congealed again in a form of government no less rigid, no less tyrannical, than that which it had cost so much blood and agony to overthrow. For the Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood which Frenchmen had hoped to win as the guerdon of all their sacrifices, men had been given to *"La Gloire"* which, forgetful of the ideals which had once inspired them, they followed, hypnotized, till it was swallowed up in the night of Waterloo.

That the gods, if they work at all, for the benefit of mankind, do not work *per saltum;* that moral progress, if discernible at all, is slow and hesitating, seeming to lose here what it had fought so hard for there—this seems the sad but undisputable truth. "All things pass, nothing abides." *"Verweile doch, du bist so schön,"* cries the artist, or the poet,—"stay while I limn thee in colour, or in sound, thou art so beautiful." In vain. "For ever wilt thou love and she be fair" is a vaunt doomed to be derided by the ruining years, and the work of art,

however lovely it may be, is destined to extinction as complete and irrevocable as the vision which called it forth.

But it must not be supposed that the meditations of Mr. Robert Evans took this turn or that they were colored either with Heraclitean melancholy or reforming zeal. Things as they then were in England struck him as being eminently satisfactory. And if the spirit of change was even then at work, its operations were indiscernible within the "green sanctuary" of Arbury Park and its agricultural dependencies. In short, Mr. Evans was a Tory well content with the existing order and determined, so far as in him lay, to maintain it. Quite close at hand, two miles off at Bedworth, for example, the beneficent dispositions of Providence were not so evident. At Bedworth, where there were coal pits and hand-looms, there were hardship, squalor and discontent by no means always unexpressed. When our own lot is tolerably happy and secure we are, without being in the least hard-hearted, accustomed to moralize with considerable complacency on the misfortunes of others. Mr. Robert Evans was not hard-hearted, but he probably held that such evils, if remediable at all, were not to be mitigated by flying in the face of your betters, or displaying discontent with the station to which God has called you. These views were certainly shared by Mrs.

Robert Evans, *née* Pearson, shrewd, practical, knowing not sloth herself, and intolerant of sloth in others. She was kind-hearted too, but with that kindness of heart which is strictly limited to the members of her own family and their connections by marriage. This circumscribed generosity—which seems to gain force from the narrow limits within which it is concentrated,—is capable of almost any sacrifice for kith and kin, but usually looks with indifference on the world outside that sphere.

In the March following Mary Ann's birth, that is to say when she was four months old, the Evans family removed to Griff, a gracious, old, red-brick, ivy-clad house on the Arbury Estate, a house whose dignity had nothing cold or austere about it, but a friendliness which seemed to hold out the promise of happiness for those fortunate enough to dwell within its walls, displaying in all its lines and proportions, that charm which influences insensibly the lives of those whose hearts are not too hard, or too indifferent, to receive the impress of gracious silent beauty. George Eliot's heart was assuredly not closed against such a charm, and Griff house, this haunt of ancient peace, was one of the abiding educative influences of her life, engraving its image slowly and imperceptibly upon her heart, disposing it to beauty, tenderness and love.

It is a common tendency, especially among the ig-

norant, to attach great importance to book-learning, to lessons. Whereas the value of such things is purely secondary, as supplying a sort of disciplinary grit or roughage for the mind to work upon. For George Eliot, the real educator was the *fallentis semita vitæ,* the hidden life in which the fibers of her being were planted and which, impressing itself silently and slowly on a heart disposed to its message, brought forth in due season the flowers which can not die.

Soon after Mary Ann was born, Mrs. Evans fell into delicate health. It became necessary to relieve her as far as possible of her household cares. Christiana, the elder girl, was sent presumably as a boarder to Miss Lathom's at Attleboro, a village about two miles from Griff, while Isaac and Mary Ann "spent some part of their time every day at the cottage of a Mrs. Moore, who kept a Dame's school close to Griff gates." Thus began the process that was to culminate in the transformation of little Mary Ann into George Eliot. She seemed to have some prescience of the high destiny in store for her. Fortunately for her, and for posterity, she did not show herself to be an infant prodigy. She was slow in learning to read, but this, according to her brother Isaac, was because she showed a marked preference for play over work—which again was salutary. Hers was "a large, slow-growing nature." From her very earliest

years it seems she showed "the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all."

And so now, day by day for a year, the little girl trots along hand in hand with her brother to learn reading and ciphering at the hands of the worthy Mrs. Moore. While the sound of the bees humming drowsily among the lavender and the sweet-william and the Virginia stocks came in at the open window, little Mary Ann—shall we picture her in a dress of lilac print, her hair drawn back from her face and caught in a ribbon, her little feet encased in stout boots?—sat side by side with her brother, learning to penetrate the secret of those mysterious signs called letters through whose agency in days to come she was to lay such a powerful and enduring spell upon the human heart. What was the book, one wonders, from which she learned to read. Was it *The Linnet's Life* which her father had given her and which she treasured as one of the dearest of her possessions?

"This little book," she wrote in after years, "is the first present I ever remember having received from my father. Let any one who thinks of me with some tenderness after I am dead, take care of this book for my sake. It made me very happy when I held it in my little hands, and read it over and over again; and thought the pic-

tures beautiful, especially the one where the linnet is feeding her young."

We are pleased to attach much importance to systems nowadays, to what are known as enlightened methods of instruction. We make a great deal of eurhythmic drills and dances, hoping, I suppose, that the rhythm of the body thus assiduously cultivated will find its counterpart in the inward rhythm of the spirit. It is all very laudable and, if the reports of those qualified to judge are to be believed, productive of highly gratifying results. But systems are necessarily conceived in relation to a raw material taken, so to speak, in the mass. It sometimes happens that Chance, which usually goes to work in a wholly unscientific manner, brings about results which, to the bewilderment and chagrin of the cognoscenti, are ridiculously and most unwarrantably successful. Who would hesitate nowadays between the methods of Mrs. Moore in her cottage outside Griff gates and those of Madame Montessori which surely flourish in perfection in many a kindergarten in Coventry or Nuneaton, to which, if she lived in these days, little Mary Ann would be taken and from which she would be brought home at evening in a swift motor-car? Not one of his Majesty's Inspectors of Schools but would plump for Montessori—and yet perhaps in this instance, for little Mary Ann Evans, it was well that

Mrs. Moore had the grounding of her. It was well, too, that she came into the world when she did and not fifty years later, because with her reverence for learning and learned people she might have attained the summit of academic distinction at Girton or Newnham and died in the odor of pedagogic sanctity as Principal of Bedford College, or the idol of the young ladies at Wycombe Abbey or Reodean; and instead of at least two masterpieces in the way of fiction she might have left behind her an illuminated address, handsomely framed in gilt, recording the affection and veneration in which she was held by her grateful and admiring pupils.

Even as it was, she suffered severely from the visitations of the academic spirit. The blight of highbrowism, of self-sufficient intellectualism laid a withering touch on her that did immense damage to her genius. Like her own Dorothea, she suffered from an exaggerated tendency to be taken in by the Casaubons of the world, a tribe which we have always with us but which flourished with sinister abundance in the days when George Eliot was growing to intellectual maturity. It is no disparagement to say of her as some one said after the appearance of *Adam Bede,* that she was "a self-educated farmer's daughter." Nevertheless it is extraordinarily difficult for one educated, as the saying goes, "above his or her station," to avoid displaying, at least occasionally, some

of the attributes of the intellectual *nouveau riche*. This was a danger from whose menace George Eliot was never wholly free. Too often she seems to be indulging in a kind of verbal virtuosity with the object of which she herself perhaps was only partly conscious, of ministering to her own self-satisfaction and dazzling the less gifted of her acquaintance with a display of her intellectual attainments. In other words, and quite plainly, her writings are sometimes infected with that taint of conscious superiority which is known as "priggishness." It is only when she forgets herself and loses herself in her theme that she writes her best and achieves an excellence which, of its kind, is unsurpassed by any other woman writer in the language.

A year later, when he was eight years old, her brother Isaac was sent away to school at Coventry. At the same time she herself, being about five years of age, went to join her elder sister Christiana, at Miss Lathom's school at Attleboro where they remained as boarders coming home occasionally to spend Saturday and Sunday at Griff. Mary Ann was by far the youngest of the pupils and was made a great fuss over by the other girls. Notwithstanding this she suffered remarkably from the cold in winter, "owing to the circle of girls forming round too narrow a fireplace." This and the night terrors with which she was afflicted were the only two shadows upon

an existence that seems to have been tranquil enough. But the holidays came round, and with the holidays came Isaac back from Coventry, a tremendous hero in the eyes of Mary Ann. A little girl, dowered with an eager imagination, a schoolboy brother with a pocket knife, a piece of string and a roving spirit, an old-fashioned garden, a pond, great shadowy barns and farm buildings—here are all the elements of paradise.

Sometimes there were adventures in a world beyond the confines of this Eden. The master's gig has been brought round to the front door of Griff house, a young servant girl has brought out the carriage whip and fixed it in its socket (it is more for show than for use, for Mr. Evans is gentle with his horses), she has also brought out a rug—the light biscuit-colored one for it is summer and the sun is shining pleasantly on the ivy that covers the old house, showing only here and there a glimpse of the mellow red brick beneath it. It also gleams and glistens on the bright nickel fittings of the harness. Soon a tall, finely built man comes out of the front door leading a little girl by the hand. He leaves her standing while he walks round the horse, satisfying himself that it has been properly "put to." Then he gives the horse a friendly pat on the neck and, taking the reins in one hand, hoists himself up into the box seat. The servant lifts up the child who takes her stand

between his knees. Then, when the dust-cloth has been tucked round them, off they go. Perhaps it's a long drive, forty or fifty miles, maybe, out and home. But the little maid is too interested to grow weary. She is excellent company, at once eager and meditative, imaginative yet inquisitive, and her father is proud of her "growing intelligence." If the drive was a long one it afforded some startling contrasts in the sights it successively presented to the gaze. There were "gray steeples" and "churchyards with their grassy mounds and venerable headstones, sleeping in the sunlight; there were broad fields and homesteads," and busy market towns. Then after tea in the evening she would sit close to her father by the fireside, poring over one or another of her favorite books, perhaps Defoe's *History of the Devil*—strange reading for a child—or *Rasselas,* or *The Pilgrim's Progress,* books which her father had picked up at an auction sale because they looked neat and well bound.

When she was thirteen there occurred an important event in her life. She was sent to a school at Coventry kept by the Misses Franklin. The school had a great reputation, and Mr. Evans was no doubt proud to think he was doing his duty by his "little wench" and that she would now receive an education worthy of any lady in the land. Miss Rebecca Franklin, we are given to understand, was "a lady of considerable intellectual power,

remarkable for her elegance in writing and conversation as well as for her beautiful culigraphy (*sic*)." From the first Mary Ann Evans showed unmistakable ability and soon made her mark in the school, particularly in music and English composition. The themes of the other children were read, criticized and corrected in class; hers were reserved for the private perusal and enjoyment of the teacher who rarely found anything to correct. As for her music master, he soon had to confess—so rapid was her progress—that he had nothing more to teach her. When any visitors came to the school, Mary Ann Evans, the "show-pupil," was summoned to the parlor to play to them and generally to impress them with the remarkable results of a training at the Misses Franklin's academy. That institution would appear to have been a forcing ground specially designed for the production of the perfect prig, and the statement that her school-fellows loved her as much as they could venture to love one whom they felt to be so immeasurably superior to themselves, imposes, unless we are to interpret it ironically, a considerable strain on our credulity.

It is not surprising to learn that this model child and exemplary pupil adopted the Calvinistic views of the Misses Franklin with intense eagerness and conviction, becoming a leader of prayer-meetings among the girls.

It was here that her friendship began with Miss Lewis, one of the school governesses, with whom she kept up an affectionate correspondence—distinguished by the elegant phraseology and "beautiful culigraphy" for which the Misses Franklin's academy was noted—until she discarded those religious convictions she had formerly professed with such pious ardor. Those convictions, which were strongly Evangelical in character, probably derived considerable reenforcement from contact with her brother Isaac who came home from a private tutor's at Birmingham, where he had been sent to finish, imbued with strong High-Church notions. "Miss Evans," we are told, could not rest satisfied with a mere profession of faith without trying to shape her own life—and it may be added, the lives around her—in accordance with her convictions. Isaac had to be told that the pursuit of pleasure—particularly no doubt of foxes, his favorite pastime—was a snare; that dress was vanity and society a danger.

Obviously this was *trop de zèle.* Things could not go on at this rate. It was flying too high. No wonder "she came down" like her own Maggie, "with her poor little half fledged wings dabbled in the mud."

Christiana, the prim and proper and unimaginative elder sister having married a Mr. Edward Clarke, a surgeon practising at Meriden in Warwickshire, the en-

tire management of the Griff household devolved on Mary Ann: cooking, jam-making, managing the servants and all the hundred and one duties that fall to the lot of the conscientious housewife. Not only did she fulfill her task with punctuality and perfection, but found time for visiting the poor, organizing clothing clubs and other works of active charity. Nor amid these multifarious and exacting occupations did she neglect the cultivation of her mind, and Mr. Brezzi of Coventry used to come over regularly and give her lessons in Italian and German while Mr. McEwen, an emissary of the Muses, also from Coventry, gave her lessons on the pianoforte. But life was "very monotonous, very difficult, very discouraging." There was no one to talk to, no one with whom to exchange ideas or unburden her mind. Yet it was that life which for all its monotony, all its dulness, was to bring her a glory to which the debating society atmosphere of her later years made but a very mediocre contribution.

CHAPTER III

DURING the summer of 1838, Mary Ann Evans spent a week with her brother in London, every day of which they "worked hard at seeing sights." She herself has said that what impressed her most of all was Greenwich Hospital; and Isaac has recorded how deeply she was affected at first hearing the great bell of Saint Paul's. Isaac, it would seem, had no qualms about going to theaters. Mary Ann did not accompany him, but spent the evenings alone, reading. Her mind did not run on frivolities. The West-End shops with their dazzling display of fashions had no charm for her. The milliners spread their lure in vain. Coldly she passed by those glittering shop-fronts round which damsels coming up to the metropolis from the provinces are wont to hover like butterflies. It was not these things that awakened her desires, but Josephus' *History of the Jews,* an estimable work, but not one generally calculated to appeal to bucolic young ladies of nineteen. But then Mary Ann was, quite evidently, not an ordinary young lady. She was fully aware of this, and, if she had ever been in danger of forgetting it, that danger had

been successfully counteracted by those well-intentioned spinsters, her school-mistresses, who had endeavored, not without success, to make of her the finished prig. Isaac at length succeeds in running a "Josephus" to earth. For himself he purchased a pair of sporting prints.

Isaac, with his High-Church views was not, it seems, disposed to let (why should he) his theological convictions interfere with his enjoyment of the kindly fruits of the earth, nor did he deem adherence to the doctrine of the apostolical succession incompatible with the pleasures of fox-hunting. Isaac, in fact, seems to have been a fair representative of the type of honest clean-living yeomen who allay the restlessness of the Old Adam within them by the comparatively harmless means of a day with the guns, or a run with the hounds when a few brace of lifeless partridges or the torn and mangled body of a fox are offered up as a sacrifice to the spirit of carnage which, they say, is latent in every human breast and which, without such outlets, might break forth with less innocuous consequences.

But Miss Evans, who neither shot nor hunted, enjoyed—as some people are said to enjoy bad health—that pessimistic view of the human race which is commonly found in the young of both sexes when they are given to over-much indulgence in introspection and

meditation. If Mary Ann had reason to be dissatisfied with the condition of her own soul, she was at least quite sure that other people's souls were in a far worse plight. And that is a great consolation. The news of a friend's marriage, for example, strikes her as being anything but an occasion for rejoicing. "For my part," she says in a letter to Miss Lewis, "when I hear of the marrying and giving in marriage that is constantly being transacted, I can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties which, though powerful enough to detach their hearts and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze." But too much importance need not be attached to this anti-matrimonial declaration. At all times the dutiful pupil in addressing a teacher is tempted to give expression, not so much to his own convictions, as to sentiments calculated to gratify or to soothe the feelings of those for whom they are intended. It may well be supposed that in thus emphasizing the risks attendant upon the matrimonial state, Miss Evans considered she was advancing opinions not unpalatable to her correspondent. "I really feel for you," she writes in this same letter to the excellent Miss Lewis, "sacrificing, as you are, your own tastes and comforts for the pleasures of others. . . . That your time and energies should be expended in ministering to the petty interests of

those far beneath you in all that is really elevating, is about as *bienséant* as that I should set fire to a goodly volume to light a match by"; which is a sentiment as nauseating as the concluding simile is silly. This sort of thing was in the air in those days. Youths and maidens writing home to their parents, or their relations, were encouraged to adopt this Little-Jack-Horner style. In an age which flourished on *Sandford and Merton* and culminated in *Eric, or Little by Little,* it is small wonder that self-conscious piety, goodness and general superiority were at a premium and that prigs were as common as gnats on a summer eve.

All the more wonder then that, when the times in general, and her circumstances in particular, seemed bent on making of her the fine flower of perfect priggishness, she should have escaped this dreadful doom; or in great measure escaped it, for the escape was not complete. In all her work one is sensible of a certain anxiety about herself, a certain desire that the reader should recognize that she, the writer, is an uncommonly gifted woman, a suggestion of the atmosphere of a literary and debating circle in a provincial town, where people can be so determinedly literary, artistic and musical, and yet remain without a particle of literature, or art, or music in their composition.

It would have been strange if one whose mind pre-

sented "an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Milton; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; Reviews and metaphysics" had not tried her own hand at authorship. A poem which she wrote in July, 1839, was published a few months later in the *Christian Observer*. It consists of ten stanzas, each ending with the word "Farewell!" as a sort of refrain. It is very solemn and sad as befits the meditations of a young lady of twenty walking alone through the fields at evening and recalling to her mind "the words of one of our martyrs." It begins thus:

> As o'er the fields by evening's light I stray,
> I hear a still small whisper—Come away;
> Thou must to this bright, lovely world soon say
> Farewell!

But not wishing to depart without leaving behind her some memorial of her piety, she conceived the idea of compiling an Ecclesiastical Chart the profits from which were to be divided between Attleboro Church and a favorite object of her own. Also she is entrusted with the arrangement and starting of a clothing club—which it will be remembered the Misses Franklin looked upon

as the high-water mark of feminine achievement. "I am ashamed," she writes to Miss Lewis, "to run the risk of troubling you, but I should be very grateful if you could send me an abstract of the rules by which yours is regulated," on reading which sentence Miss Lewis, one imagines, noting with approval the gratifying results of her own tuition, must have exclaimed, "How well Mary Ann Evans always expresses herself!"

But the chart which was "successively [to] contain the Roman Emperors with their dates, the political and religious state of the Jews, the Bishops, remarkable men and events in the several Churches," et cetera, "in a series of perpendicular columns," a most elaborate affair, was fated never to be completed. Neither Attleboro Church, nor the "favorite object" of its compiler, was to benefit by the ingenious and imposing work thus projected. The chart idea seemed to be in the air, since shortly afterward we find her imparting to Miss Lewis, "without a sigh" that some one else had stepped in before her. "Seeley & Burnside," she says, "have just published a Chart of Ecclesiastical History. . . . I console all my little regrets by thinking that what is thus evidenced to be a desideratum has been executed much better than if left to my slow fingers and slower head." And no doubt Miss Lewis again approved of her former pupil's epistolary style, as she perused a phrase at once

so ladylike and intellectual as "what is thus evidenced to be a desideratum has been executed . . ."

The chart having been consigned to the limbo of still-born ambitions, Miss Evans addresses herself with renewed zeal to the Italian and German lessons which Mr. Brezzi of Coventry comes regularly to give her. She sets herself to read a volume of the Oxford Tracts and the *Lyra Apostolica.* She buys herself a copy of the *Christian Year,* "a volume of sweet poetry."

The round of intellectual pursuits and domestic duties is interrupted by a visit with her father to Derbyshire. She gazes on the "everlasting hills," she visits Ashborne Church, "the finest mere parish church in the kingdom," Alton Gardens where she sees actually what she had often seen mentally—the bread-fruit tree, the fan-palm and the papyrus, and, finally, Lichfield Cathedral, where, besides the exquisite architectural beauties both external and internal, she saw Chantrey's famous monument of the *Sleeping Children.*

After these exciting experiences she returned to the boiling of currant jelly. Alas, she complains that she can not go through these household duties "so cheerfully as the character of a Christian who professes to do *all,* even the most trifling duty, as the Lord demands." Indeed the boiling of the currant jelly seems so to have affected her that she can not at once proceed to the read-

ing of Mrs. Somerville's *Connection of the Physical Sciences* which is the next serious work to which she directs her attention.

Some one, we are not told who, "bestows" on her the "very pretty cognomen" of Clematic, which she tells Miss Lewis, signifies in floral language "mental beauty." A delicate, but perhaps not altogether undiscriminating compliment. When she gets her dictionary—presumably a present from the bestower of the floral "cognomen,"—she, in turn, will find a suitable flower name for Miss Lewis. It turned out to be Veronica—"friendship."

So the life at Griff pursues its tranquil yet laborious course. She goes to Birmingham and listens enchanted to the music of Handel and Haydn, the beauty of them affecting her to tears. She comes home to make damson cheese, and to read Schiller and Tasso under the direction of Mr. Brezzi and finds that she has more affinity with German than Italian. From reading the poetry of Felicia Hemans, whose *Forest Sanctuary* she pronounces exquisite, she turns aside to make the mince meat for Christmas, which is now close at hand, finding time, amid all her multitudinous household occupations to peruse *The Life and Times of Louis XIV* and from it to discover a sympathy with some of the aspects of war. "Certainly war, though the heaviest scourge with which

the divine wrath against sin is manifested in Time, has been a necessary vent for impurities and a channel for tempestuous passions that must have otherwise made the whole earth, like the land of the devoted Canaanites, to vomit forth the inhabitants thereof. Awful as such a sentiment appears, it seems to me that in the present condition of man (and I do not mean this in the sense that Cowper does), such a purgation of the body politic is probably essential to its health. A foreign war would soon put an end to our national humors, that are growing to so alarming a head." Now, when the means of purgation have been reenforced by the submarine, aërial navies and poisoned gas, to name but three of the amenities of modern warfare, she might have been disposed to favor a gentler means of ridding the body politic of its "national humors," lest not only the humors but the nation, perhaps the whole fabric of civilization, should go down in the cathartic process.

A momentous change was now about to take place in her life. Hitherto she had dwelt as in a green sanctuary where the sound of strife never penetrated. True, eight years before she had witnessed an election riot at Nuneaton after the passing of the Reform Bill, and from the newspapers and from hearsay she was of course aware of the storms that raged beyond the peaceful close that hedged her round, and the rumor of them fell upon her

ear like the sound of the billows that mourn and rave on some far-off alien shore.

But now she was on the eve of a great change, a change in the outward, material setting of her life, which was destined to find its counterpart in an inward change still more momentous and more striking. Her brother, who had long been associated with Robert Evans in the land agent's business, marries. It was decided that he and his bride should settle at Griff and that Mary Ann and her father should make their home in Coventry. A semi-detached house is taken in the Foleshill Road and to this, their new home, they came in March, 1841. It was pleasantly situated, with a sufficiency of garden around it, and though the immediate foreground was disfigured by the presence of mills and chimneys its upper windows afforded a wide view of the surrounding country.

It was not without sorrow that she viewed the prospect of bidding farewell to Griff,and in a letter written in the late autumn of what was to be her last year in her old home, she urges Miss Lewis with a pathetic insistency to come and spend her holidays with her there "that we may once more meet," she says, "among scenes which, now I am called upon to leave them, I find to have *grown in* to my affections." These scenes which had imprinted themselves so deeply on her heart and

mind, never failed to remain with her, distilling, all her life long, those visions of the quiet and simple life of country folk, visions which, sweetening her spirit, bring it safe and unsullied across the desert of arid philosophy and barren intellectualism through which she was to pass.

But it was not merely the material landmarks of her childhood and youth from which she was now to be sundered. To these, if she no longer dwelt among them, she could return. Despite the inevitable changes wrought by time and modern progress, they remained unaltered in their essential spirit. "Our midland plains," she wrote long afterward, "have never lost their familiar expression and conservative spirit for me." They remained and she could revisit them and refresh her spirit, when she would, with the fadeless flowers of other years. But other landmarks there were, other signs, which did not abide. The old convictions, the old beliefs to which she had trusted so fervently began to vacillate and grow dim. She was like a wayfarer journeying along a road that suddenly comes to an end upon a wide moor pathless and uncharted, with none of whom to ask the way. Often, as she pursued her pilgrimage across this lonely tract, her thoughts stole back, yearning, but never satisfied, to old times and old places, when Evangelical Christianity had seemed to requite all the needs of her soul. These she found not, but the

memory of them, and of the places with which her old ardors had been linked, lent an abiding grace to her spirit, tempering the self-sufficiency of her intellectualism, and lending to her thoughts and to her expression of them a grace and a charm which render the best of her work immune from the corrosion of time.

The accomplishments of which she and her friends made so much, that education by which she set such store, the training imparted by those excellent ladies, the Misses Franklin and Miss Lewis, the lessons of the worthy Mr. Brezzi, the study of Josephus' *History of the Jews,* and all of those other learned works into which she plunged with such avidity, were of infinitely less importance in the molding and perfecting of her genius than the sights and sounds she unconsciously stored up within her memory when, as a little child, standing between her father's knees, she drove about the quiet lanes of her Warwickshire home. Philosophies have a way of growing old and falling into decay. Systems which, at their birth, dazzle the eye and seize upon the mind with a peremptoriness that brooks no denial, sooner or later crumble and are disintegrated with the long process of the sun. Or if they stand, are left forlorn and untenanted, like a church forsaken of its worshipers, preserved only as a museum or as a memorial of a past long since defunct. Philosophies then must needs fall a prey to this inevitable obsolescence and de-

cay, and the science on which they are founded is no less afflicted with caducity.

Truth, save indeed it be divinely revealed, is beyond man's utmost reach, but Beauty, which is an aspect, a reflection, an "economy" of truth, though it may be obscured, neglected, forgotten, thrust aside, can never be destroyed. It may be deposed, cast down, but sooner or later it reappears, like the sun after a season of storm and cloud, and reigns anew in its old dominion, the heart of man. Beauty is the sovereign antidote against the ravages of time, and whatsoever has Beauty within it can not be overwhelmed by the cataract of years. So it is with George Eliot. She lives, her works are instinct with life because, and in proportion as, the spirit of Beauty resides in them. It was once more, not her book-learning, not the "*culture livresque*" of which she made so much, and of which it is pardonable, nay, praiseworthy of young men and women alive to intellectual interests, to hold of supreme importance—it was not her academic attainments, her science, her reading of abstruse works, not even her discussions with that original philosopher and phrenologist, Mr. Bray, that marked her with the sign of immortality, but the recorded memory of some chance morning or evening in the Warwickshire lanes, or some quiet homestead in a rural England of whose vanished grace her works are among the priceless and imperishable memorials.

Before she left Griff, Miss Evans had carried into effect an intention which she had not regarded with pleasure. She had read some of the Oxford Tracts which she found so little in accordance with her sympathies. that she flew to Isaac Taylor's *Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts* as an antidote. Isaac Taylor she describes in a letter to Miss Lewis as one of the most eloquent, acute and pious of writers. The antidote did its work with a rapidity and a completeness which, had he known of it, would have startled and dismayed the pious spirit of the good Isaac Taylor.

O good apothecary thy drugs were sure!

and so potent that in this case they removed not only the Tractarian tares, but, with them, the Evangelical wheat. Not indeed at once. She did not suddenly wake up to find herself a freethinker. "From the impression made on my own mind," says Miss Mary Sibree, the daughter of a non-conformist minister in Coventry whose acquaintance Mary Ann made a year or two later, "by unfavorable facts about 'The Fathers,' and from her own subsequent references to this work, I am inclined to think it had its influence in unsettling her views of Christianity." What Isaac Taylor began, it was fated that Mr. Bray and "the small circle of cultured people" of which he was the center were to complete.

CHAPTER IV

MR. BRAY, ribbon manufacturer and professed freethinker, had many reasons to account himself a happy man. His business, a prosperous one, left him considerable leisure, which he enjoyed amid the amenities of Rosehill, a charming retreat "with a beautiful lawn and garden, on the outskirts of Coventry." It must not be supposed that, because Mr. Bray was a freethinker in matters of religion, he was possessed of a mind naturally disposed to incredulity, for all his life long he retained a sincere and touching belief in the science of phrenology. He had already given to the world a work on the *Education of the Feelings* viewed from the phrenological standpoint, and now in 1841, his most important work, *The Philosophy of Necessity,* saw the light. Authors in those days did not grow on every bush as they do now. To have written a book was an achievement that carried with it considerable prestige. The volume stood printed and bound, patent to the eye, ready to the touch, a tangible and visible guarantee that the writer was no ordinary person. It would be handed down, like an heirloom or a totem, to the veneration of succeeding generations.

Mary Ann Evans entertained that immoderate respect for people of the cultured class, for the intelligentsia, which is usual with the rapidly enlightened sons and daughters of artizans and peasants. They offer a striking contrast to those lords of the earth, such as sporting baronets and fox-hunting squires, who talk contemptuously about "those writing-fellows," looking on a man who earns his living by his pen as a sort of humble usher for whom a respectable lady's-maid or an upper-housekeeper would offer a suitable match; but to admit such a person into the family circle, save at rare intervals and as an act of gracious condescension, would be regarded as eccentric and revolutionary. "Ah, still scribblin', Mr. Gibbon, still scribblin'," a certain noble lord exclaimed when he called on the historian one day and found him hard at work on *The Decline and Fall.* Miss Evans would not indeed have fallen at his feet and kissed them, but would have expressed her admiration in language that would have done full credit to the lessons in decorum inculcated in the Misses Franklin's Academy for Young Ladies.

But Mr. Bray, the disciple of that George Combe who promised to take away the sins of the world by the application of a few "scientific" formulæ, was not the only cultured member of her new Coventry circle. Mrs. Bray, who herself entertained a very dutiful admiration

for her husband's philosophical conclusions, had a brother, and that brother was none other than that Charles Hennell whose *Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity,* published in 1838, had been translated into German and prefaced by Strauss. This work, by which its author converted himself from a champion into an adversary of Christianity, seems to have completed the process which, begun by Isaac Taylor, had been sensibly advanced by the disquisitions of the philosophical ribbon manufacturer and the generally skeptical atmosphere of the Bray household. Mary Ann Evans lost her faith in Christianity.

The process of disintegration seems to have been rapid. How far the attack from without may have been simultaneously assisted by a change of heart from within is a question that must be deferred for the present. There was, however, in the composition of "that saint, Mary Ann Evans," as she was once called, a considerable infusion of Mother Eve, a depth and vehemence of passion to which her biographers and critics have hitherto thought it indecorous or at least inopportune to allude, and which might have resulted in her summary banishment from those countless respectable households where she dwells the idol of the middle-class heart.

Miss Evans was no mere intellectual abstraction. That she was the possessor of extraordinary intellectual gifts,

no one will deny. But these intellectual gifts, this power of brain, have been so insisted upon as, at least in the popular imagination, to have done much to unsex her and to give her more than a touch of supposed masculinity. That idea of her derived no small reenforcement from her portraits. Though they reveal a countenance not devoid of a certain pensive grace, the more perilous of feminine allurements are not conspicuously apparent in them.

It is this tendency to regard her as disembodied intellect which seemed for her not only the toleration, but the considered approval of people who would have relegated her to outer darkness, had they not been able to persuade themselves that her conduct, which they officially deplored, was devoid of real offense because it was dictated by principle and not by passion. An act which is a sin when it results from instinct, is merely a regrettable error when it proceeds from an inference. We may exhibit the courage of our opinions, but not of our passions. But George Eliot was no mere compendium of unincarnate abstractions. She was a genius, and genius, however sublimated, however etherealized, is basically an affair of the instincts and the passions.

But the last place in which a genius may expect recognition is among his own friends. Certainly, at this time, neither George Eliot nor the cultured circle at Coventry

had any inkling of the destiny that awaited her. Mr. Bray no doubt regarded her as a highly intelligent young woman, since she devoured his books with diligence and listened to his discourse with becoming attention. While the author in him was doubtless flattered by this deference, the ribbon manufacturer probably rejoiced that the vast majority of young women exhibited the normal preferences of their sex and put finery before philosophy.

These Coventry intellectuals with whom she found herself were exceedingly kind to her; she enjoyed herself in their society and looked on them with sincere affection. But there seems no indication that any one of them had an idea of her greatness or dreamed that she possessed any rarer gifts than such painstaking efficiency as would fit her to be the organizer of a clothing club, or enable her to translate somebody else's work with credit. Yet deep in the bosom of this rather pedantic and very serious-minded young person, there was smoldering a hidden fire which was in due time to bring forth works destined to be read with tears of admiration by successive generations of English-speaking people, in every quarter of the globe, long after the last solitary copy of Mr. Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* had crumpled to pieces, scorched by the sun and soddened by the rain, amid the miscellaneous lumber of the two-penny stall.

CHAPTER V

THOUGH it would be a great exaggeration to say that George Eliot's removal from Griff to Coventry did her nothing but good it would be an even greater exaggeration to say it did her no good at all. Nothing in this life comes to us as an "unmixed blessing," as the saying has it. The *amari aliquid* lies hidden somewhere in the most seemingly fortunate existence. Though her years in the country made the most priceless contributions to her education, using that word in its widest sense, it is likely enough that, if she had remained at Griff, she would never have been heard of to-day. Had she stayed on under her father's roof, her domestic duties would have encroached more and more upon her studies, she would probably have married some neighboring yeoman attracted by her skill in jam-making, and the genius which gave us *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* would have found no wider field for its exhibition than the limits of her house and garden, and have left behind it no more glorious memorial of itself than a story or two, or a few articles on domestic economy in the parish magazine.

It was to be a long and sometimes wearisome apprenticeship that George Eliot was to pay to Literature. More than ten years were to pass in occupations which, tedious, exacting and heavy though they might be, would prepare her to acquit herself with honor in a task whose nature as yet she did not even guess at. That she, the model pupil of the Misses Franklin, with all her knowledge and accomplishments, and her plain serious features, should take an honored place among these Coventry intellectuals, was probably the highest ambition of this soul as yet unconscious of its true inheritance.

There is no real point of contact, no common ground, between genius and talent. It is a truism to say that they differ, not in degree, but in kind, and that until genius breaks forth from its chrysalis and displays itself in hues to which even the cleverest can not be blind, it will probably have to play second fiddle to intelligence. Talent, to whatever degree intensified, will not produce genius; genius lies on a different system, accessible from no junction on the line of talent.

And it so happened that everything, or at all events much, had been done in her education to keep her genius in the background, so that not only her friends and relations but even strangers who might have had more insight, were unsuspicious of its existence and saw, in

the retired land-agent's daughter, nothing more than an intelligent young woman who had made the most of her time at school. The good is the enemy of the best, and George Eliot had so much to her credit; her interests, genuine not assumed, in order to impress, were so far above those of the average young woman, she read such learned books, holding her own in philosophical discussions with Mr. Bray himself, that we need not wonder if she felt that this was already a destiny exalted enough for one of her antecedents and training. For an obscure country girl, the child of a sometime carpenter and stone-mason, to win the respect of the author of *The Philosophy of Necessity*—a work by no means intended for the multitude—was surely an achievement of which she might legitimately be proud!

As a general rule, geniuses do not shine at school, sometimes exhibiting in their childhood characteristics scarcely distinguishable from imbecility. David Hume was looked on by his parents as "wake minded," and Anatole France only once—and that by accident—rose to the top of his class. There is commonly a waywardness, a disposition to dream their own dreams, about these children of the Muses, hardly calculated to win for them the approbation of the constituted authorities. Not so with George Eliot. She is a notable exception to this rule. Never did genius dissemble itself in a more

convincing disguise of efficiency. "Do it now," was a mandate she obeyed with a conscientiousness that would have won her the approval of the most exacting of bureaucrats—do it now and do it thoroughly. Her household duties were discharged with a punctuality and a completeness that her own Mrs. Poyser would have warmly approved, and if in her letters she sometimes exclaims against the drudgery of such tasks, it is less to express dissatisfaction with her lot than to make it clear to her correspondent, the excellent Miss Lewis, that though circumstances compelled her to display her efficiency in the making of mince-pies and damson cheese, her soul was hungering for "higher things." When she speaks to Miss Lewis of these importunate interruptions to her studies and meditations, she still employs the language of Christian resignation. She foretells a swift termination to an interval of calm, and she continues, "This is not our rest, if we are among those for whom there remaineth one, and to pass through life without tribulation (or, as Jeremy Taylor beautifully says, with only such a measure of it as may be compared to an artificial discord in music, which nurses the ear for the returning harmony) would leave us destitute of one of the marks that invariably accompany salvation, and of that fellowship in the sufferings of the Redeemer which can alone work in us a resemblance to one of the most prom-

inent parts of His divinely perfect character, and enable us to obey the injunction, 'In patience possess your souls.' " To such an expression of such a sentiment Miss Lewis could certainly not take exception. The disintegrating effect of Isaac Taylor's book, which sought to prove corruption already existing in that primitive church to which the Tractarians appealed, would seem to be suspended.

Six or seven months later we find her writing again to Miss Lewis on this subject. "My whole soul," she says, "has been engrossed in the most interesting of all inquiries for the last few days, and to what result my thoughts may lead, I know not—possibly to one that will startle you; but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error. I venture to say our love will not decompose under the influence of separation, unless you excommunicate me for differing from you in opinion. . . . I long to have a friend such as you are, I think I may say, alone to me, to unburthen every thought and difficulty—for I am still a solitary, though near a city. But we have the universe to talk with, infinity in which to stretch the gaze of hope, and an all-bountiful, all-wise Creator in whom to confide,—He who has given us the untold delights of which our reason, our emotion, our sensations are the ever-springing sources. . . . What a pity," she adds, "that while mathematics

are indubitable, immutable, and no one doubts the properties of a triangle or a circle, doctrines infinitely important to man are buried in a charnel-heap of bones over which nothing is heard but the barks and growls of contention!"

The love which she ventured to say would not "decompose under the influence of separation," appears suddenly to have been extinguished altogether, for the correspondence seems to have ceased abruptly at this point. Who was responsible for its discontinuance? We may perhaps not too rashly infer that when those very brilliant planets, the Brays and the Hennells, swam into her ken, the pale faint star, her Evangelical governess, faded into invisibility. George Eliot must not be blamed. Genius is often unconsciously and unintentionally selfish. Miss Lewis had served her turn thus far, and now her day was over. The clear confident demonstrations of Mr. Bray and his allies were to induce a state of mind in which the futility and childishness of her early beliefs would be clearly apparent. Something of that unassailable finality which is conspicuous among "the properties of circles and triangles," now took possession of her reason and invaded her heart. That heart of hers, if we read the signs aright, was already disposed to capitulation. Her conversion or perversion, as some would prefer to call it,

was perhaps not wholly, or primarily, intellectual. Most people picture her to themselves as a calm, grave, passionless creature with features to which the uncharitable would apply the description equine. She figures in the popular imagination as a highly respectable and prodigiously learned person, one whose respectability derived tremendous emphasis from the deliberate and august solemnity with which she invested her solitary and public defiance of it. In a word her apologists and interpreters have, with the best intentions in the world, done her a signal disservice, they have *dehumanized* her. It is true that her readmission into the human family might be left to Time. Time is an agency that in the long run eats away all that is corruptible, disengaging the pure bright metal from the dross that surrounds and obscures it. But Time has a great deal on his hands and his action is slow. Perhaps, therefore, though it savor of temerity, one may be permitted not perhaps to forestall, but at all events to foretell what the ultimate verdict of that final court of appeal will prove to be. Even to raise the question is some good, since the discussion of it may induce some members of a generation disdainful of the age which preceded it, to turn their attention to a writer whose powers of observation and expression, whose humor and pathos, whose sense of tears in mortal things, are of the authentic Shakespearean vintage.

George Eliot was to derive great good and great harm, from her contact, during the next decade of her life, with the glib skepticism and pseudo-philosophy of Mr. Bray and his school. Not that we wish to decry Mr. Bray. He was no doubt a very sensible and intelligent man. He threw himself into the philosophical and religious questions of his day with ardor, and solved them to his satisfaction and if his influence had been confined to the talented mediocrities who composed his circle, considerable good and very little harm would have been done. But when George Eliot was drawn into the system of this luminary, she sustained an injury the effects of which, though intermittent in their manifestations, did in fact remain with her to the end, rarely and faintly apparent when her genius was at its height, recovering their sinister ascendency as her genius began to decline. In after years, when she had had experience of life, when she had found her vocation and when even the triumphs of that vocation were beginning to be viewed by her in their true perspective, she cast many a backward glance over these Coventry experiences and thought, not indeed without affection, but with some pity and perhaps a shade of contempt, of those rather pretentious little philosophers who had strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage with such complacent satisfaction in the validity of their own conclusion.

A day was to come when she was to declare that many things she would have argued against ten years ago, she now felt herself too ignorant and too limited in moral sensibility to speak of with confident disapprobation. On the question of a future life in which she had formerly pronounced her disbelief, she was now less ready to dogmatize, the world-old questionings were again making themselves heard in her heart, though she set them aside, being convinced "that the immediate object and the proper sphere of all our highest emotions are our struggling fellow-men in this earthly existence." To her friend, Barbara Smith, who had married and become Madame Bodichon, she writes: "Pray don't ever ask me again not to rob a man of his religious belief, as if you thought my mind tended to such robbery. I have too profound a conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with no-faith, to have any negative propagandism in me. In fact, I have very little sympathy with freethinkers as a class, and have lost all interest in mere antagonism to religious doctrines. I care only to know, if possible, the lasting meaning that lies in all religious doctrine from the beginning till now." And later she was to write thus of Renan: "He has always seemed to me remarkable as a French mind that is at once 'scientific' (in the German sense) and eminently tender and reverent to-

wards the forms in which the religious sentiment has incarnated itself."

There are people who tread the path of rectitude unerringly, because they have never been tempted to wander from it; people who hold danger cheap, because danger has never visited them. Who is the brave man? Not he who is unconscious of danger; but the coward who is tempted to run, and does not. George Eliot had too much humanity in her, too much experience of the weaknesses of the flesh, to have any lasting sympathy with the smug philosophers and the pinchbeck skeptics with whom at Coventry she found herself in association. But for the moment the skeptics triumphed, and Miss Evans gave up going to church.

Mr. Evans, her father, is described as a churchman of the old school, which seems to mean that it mattered little what one believed, or disbelieved, so long as the forms and customs of religion were duly observed. His hold on the doctrines of religion appears to have been feeble and precarious, his belief in the virtues of churchgoing was unshakable. The decay of her religious beliefs—of which he can scarcely have been ignorant—affected him but mildly, if at all. He probably regarded it as a transient disorder incident to youth, which a very little time would cure. When, however, the young woman announced that she would go to church no more,

Mr. Evans was fully aroused. The claims of logic and reason which are so compelling to the young, are often regarded by their elders with a vexatious indifference. Having arrived, after due consideration, at the view that dogmatic religion was false and based on ignorance or delusion, she thought it not only logical but honest to abstain from attending the place where those falsities were expounded.

Mr. Evans, however, who had been a churchgoer all his life, and his father before him, and his again before him, could not see how a religion which had existed so long in the world, which had such a hold on the lives of the people, rich and poor alike, could suddenly be found out to be false and hollow by his daughter. To talk and argue, to discuss and demonstrate, that was all a matter of words, and deeds were more important than words in Mr. Evans' world. It was all very clever no doubt, and he might, good easy man, have been secretly proud at the skill with which his "little wench" conducted her arguments in these theological discussions, even holding her own against the Baptist minister sent on by Miss Franklin to convince her of the error of her ways. But to discomfit the Baptist minister was one thing. To turn your back on God Almighty by staying away from church,—that was serious, that must be put a stop to. His daughter was obdurate and would not

give way. The father, equally firm, insisted. The *odium theologicum* was raging with all its virulence in this pleasant-looking semi-detached residence in the Foleshill Road; so that for its present inmates it was like to become uninhabitable. The ineluctable recurrence of Sunday and the painful reminder it brought him of his daughter's impiety, was too much for Mr. Evans senior, who "put into an agent's hand the lease of the house in the Foleshill Road," and intimated his intention of going to live with his married daughter.

Miss Evans, dogmatically anti-dogmatic, was, at this moment, of the stuff that martyrs are made of. She would have died rather than yield one inch. Faith had gone and so, apparently, had Charity. Hope—the prerogative of youth—appears not to have failed her. She did not die. She decided to go to Leamington. Teaching, the common resource of the desperate, was to furnish the means of keeping body and soul together. But it is given to few to persist in the martyr's spirit. It is a passion not unlike love. If we suffer the supreme moment to pass, it never returns. Other occasions for martyrdom or for passionate devotion may arise, but the cause will not be the same. We forbore to knock at the door when the time was ripe; we may knock in vain now. So the cause which seemed so grand, so worthy of martyrdom yesterday, has shed not a little of its splendor

to-day. Thus it was with George Eliot. Leamington seemed to offer but a dismal prospect. And, after all, what was at the bottom of all this intransigeance? Here was she free at last from the trammels of dogma, herself dogmatizing—negatively it is true—as uncompromisingly as any Covenanter, and in the process breaking an old man's heart. That she could not endure. For all her pedantry and opinionatedness, she was too exquisitely sensitive for that. She had in her composition no more of the stuff of which martyrs are made, than had Henry of Navarre, who deemed Paris worth a mass. Not that it was the material aspect of the case that influenced her. The dismal lodgings and the scanty fare at Leamington would have had no terrors for her. The comfort she craved was the comfort to her heart, for great as were her qualities of mind and intellect, the qualities of her heart were greater still. Thus the breach was healed. She came back to the house in the Foleshill Road, and she went to church. Pedantry played a large part in her composition, but humanity played a larger. The battle between these opposing forces was fierce, but humanity won. For any one who had been able to foretell the future and to see in that rather pragmatical and opinionated young lady, the author of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss,* the issue could never have been in doubt. Sir Leslie Stephen puts it well when he says:

"To her exquisitely sensitive nature, the pain of inflicting pain on others would not have been compensated by any share of the true controversialist's joy in battle." So for the next seven years, till his death in 1849, she lived contentedly with her father.

She went with the Brays on summer excursions to the Lakes, to Wales and to Scotland. Robert Owen and, later, Emerson ("the first *man,*" she says, "I have ever seen!") visit the Brays at Rosehill. From Miss Brabant, a friend of the Hennells, who relinquished the task on her marriage to Charles Hennell, she took over the translation of Strauss' *Life of Jesus.* This work took her two years to accomplish, and though she soon came to regard it as "a soul-stupefying labour," it has been pronounced "an admirable and workmanlike translation." After the death of her father, whom she tended with devoted care, she went with the Brays on a visit to the Continent, staying on, after their return to England, at Geneva in the house of Monsieur and Madame D'Albert with whom she made an enduring friendship. On her return, she accepted, at the invitation of Chapman the publisher, the post of assistant editor of the *Westminster Review* which he had lately purchased. She came to London and boarded with the Chapmans in the Strand and became acquainted with many literary celebrities.

CHAPTER VI

SOMEWHERE about the middle of the eighteenth century the provincial theaters of England resounded to the declamations of an actor named Charles Lee Lewes, who had disdained the hosiery business which his father pursued in London and gone upon the stage, where he shone with only a moderate luster. The apogee of his career was attained when he enacted the part of Young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer,* and recited an epilogue specially written for him by Goldsmith. After this his fortunes steadily declined till he found himself shut up in prison for debt. There he endeavored to beguile the tedium of his solitude by composing his *Memoirs,* which were published by his son and read by nobody. Having discharged this act of filial but unremunerative piety, the son turned his attention to other matters and performed a deed which gave him no slight claim to the recognition of posterity. He became the father of George Henry Lewes, a man remarkable in himself and still more remarkable for his influence on George Eliot. At first sight it appears strange that a young woman who had been brought up in the fear of

the Lord, who had been nurtured with unremitting solicitude by those blameless spinsters, the Misses Franklin, and their no less impeccable coadjutress, Miss Lewis, should have been influenced in any manner other than unfavorably by this grandson of a down-at-heel actor, whose desultory upbringing and Bohemian views were calculated to horrify the selecter circle of Coventry society.

The records appear to be silent regarding George Henry's father. That is, no doubt, to his credit. At all events he seems to have done not a little to give his son a varied education. George Henry, we are told, was educated in London, Jersey, Brittany and, finally, Doctor Burney's school at Greenwich. But the Stage was in his blood. He could no more resist the lure of the footlights than a sailor the call of the sea. For a decade—from 1841 to 1850—he was on, and off, the stage. Then he married a lady called Jervis whom he supported on the intermittent proceeds of free-lance journalism. This lady bore him three children and then, not apparently without excuse, forgot her marriage vows. Lewes, though by no means strict in these matters himself, found her pranks too broad to bear with, excluded her *a mensa et thoro,* though a formal divorce we are told was impossible. The reason why it was impossible is given neither by Mr. Cross nor apparently by any of

George Eliot's biographers unless it is perhaps implicit in the statement that George Henry Lewes was a Bohemian. But if he was a Bohemian he was no idle one. He read enormously and indiscriminately, and he wrote prolifically. His writings may betray hasty impulse and imperfect study; but they are decidedly alive—which more academic productions sometimes are not. He was the author, in addition to the reviews and fugitive articles that flamed from his untiring pen, of books on Actors and Acting, on the Spanish Drama, of an attempt, and no unskilful one, to vindicate Robespierre, and hitherto most important of all, of a *Biographical History of Philosophy,* the ultimate aim of which was to prove that that same philosophy wherein he was no inconsiderable adept, was but "an ever renewed fruitless endeavor to attain the unattainable." In or about 1850 he and Thornton Leigh Hunt founded the *Leader,* designed as an organ of enlightened liberal opinion. But though he was later on to write a *Life of Goethe* which still holds its own as a standard work, his greatest work was an anonymous and a vicarious one. His enduring achievement was to stimulate and to stir into productive activity the dormant genius of George Eliot. Neither the Brays, nor the Hennells, nor the Brabants, nor Mr. Chapman, nor Herbert Spencer nor Emerson could effect what this queer little actor-philosopher-journalist

was able to effect. The admiration, the probably somewhat condescending admiration, of these other eminent people had left her flattered perhaps, satisfied certainly, but cold. It needed the intimate touch of the lover, the warmth of his sympathy to cause her genius to spring up, and send its green shoots through the dry leaves of the complacent intellectualism that lay like a pall upon her.

One may wonder whether the genius of George Eliot would ever have come to flower had George Henry Lewes not appeared on the scene. Almost certainly it would not. Despite the seeming strength of her character, despite the confidence, the opinionatedness, we may almost say, with which she advanced her views in her religious and philosophical discussions with her friends, this strength, this defiance, were but the armor automatically assumed by a nature, egoistic, yet intensely feminine and almost painfully sensitive, which yearned with pathetic eagerness for the sympathy and encouragement of a kindred spirit. Friendly and affectionate as were her relations with the Brays and their circle, it is doubtful whether any of these excellent people really saw in her anything more than what the Misses Franklin had told them to expect,—namely, a highly intelligent girl who had done them signal credit as a pupil and who would be bound "to get up some-

thing sooner or later." A "clothing club," meetings of the penny reading order, designed to illumine the minds of the denizens of "Pudding Pits" and other dim purlieus of Coventry—such were about the limits of the expectations they entertained of this worthy daughter of a no less worthy father, the retired land-steward and ex-stone-mason and carpenter. She had a graceful touch on the piano, and it was agreeable to hear her accompany herself of an evening in the pleasant drawing-room at Rosehill, as she sang in a voice which though by no means strong was eminently sweet and true. It does not appear whether Mr. Robert Evans, her father, made one of the company at these gatherings. Probably at his own wish, he stayed at home. It needs the highest breeding, the ease and tact which are not to be acquired in one generation or even two, to put a countryman such as the farmer of Griff at his ease in such unaccustomed surroundings, and it is probable that Robert Evans would have been far more at home in the society of such men as Parson Irwine and his aristocratic old mother in the dining-room at Broxton Rectory, that comfortable, rather shabby apartment which nevertheless conveyed with its air of distinction the suggestion that its inhabitants had more blood than money. The drawing-room at Rosehill, the society of the cultured ribbon manufacturer and his excellent wife and daughters would have

offered but chill entertainment to Robert Evans, who was assuredly learned neither in phrenology nor in literature; and although he could calculate to a nicety the amount of timber in a standing tree, or the value of a field of wheat, he would have been hard put to it to offer any useful or intelligible observation on so recondite a matter as the *Philosophy of Necessity.* Miss Martineau and Mr. Herbert Spencer would have failed to draw him, and it is doubtful whether he would have found much in common with that ardent philosopher, Robert Owen. But there was one man with whom, had he lived to know him, he would certainly have accorded well—at least until he took his daughter to live with him in conditions of which as a churchman he could not have approved, and that man was George Henry Lewes.

It would perhaps be too much to say that this queer-looking little man with his big head and plain features —Douglas Jerrold said he was "the ugliest man in London"—himself had genius; but certainly he was what the French call *"génial."* He was one of those people, gay, light-hearted, irrepressible, alive to the very finger-tips (yet not without a touch of sadness), for whom life is a joyous adventure, a sort of D'Artagnan, or better perhaps, a Figaro, who would play the solemn philosopher for the mere fun of the thing and, without any

learning, save what was self-acquired, challenge grave and laborious professors, and beat them at their own game. Yet he was no mountebank, no charlatan. Far from it. Versatility is a quality which solemn people are pleased to associate with shallowness. It is the apology they offer for their own dulness.

We likened him just now to Figaro, and the comparison was not inapt. Certainly he had had as many, and as exciting, adventures as that engaging hero of romance, and if sometimes, like his prototype, he laughed at things, it was in order that he might not be tempted to weep at them. Like Figaro he was a match, and more than a match, for the pedants—"*à pédant, pédant et demi!*"

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS not until George Eliot was thirty-six that she came into her kingdom. Her apprenticeship had been long and severe, and not, it must be confessed, invariably appropriate to the part which destiny was to assign to her. She had translated Strauss, Feuerbach and Spinoza and had acquitted herself of the task in a manner that proved her capacity to enter into intellectual communion with those writers. The task had been immense and had become a terrible soul-stupefying burden before she reached the end. To the literary artist, to the possessor that is to say of a literary conscience, to one whom an ill-turned sentence afflicts with a sense of physical discomfort, translating is an extraordinarily exacting art. But, if it be not excessively prolonged, it is at least a salutary one. It is an extraordinarily effective way of acquiring ease and facility in the use of one's instruments. It would be difficult to imagine a task more profitable and stimulating to one's sense of style than for an Englishman to render into English passages from a French writer exhibiting the grace and charm of Renan, or for a Frenchman to essay to recap-

ture, in his own idiom, something of the music and stately simplicity of Newman. The exercise is good, as long as one does not attempt too much of it and provided the author to be rendered is one who awakens one's sympathies and betrays such graces of thought and expression as render the task a congenial one. I am not aware however that Strauss does exhibit any peculiar attractiveness on the score of style. Moreover the work was an exceedingly long one, and for many months before she had brought it to a conclusion it had become an almost intolerable burden to her.

But this was not the only way, or the most agreeable, by which she gained ease of expression. There were of course the articles and criticisms she wrote for the *Westminster Review*, the *Leader* and other periodicals, and they too were useful enough in their way. But more important than these and more valuable by far as a means of self-expression were her letters. In these days, when letter-writing has become almost a lost art, George Eliot would have been described as a voluminous correspondent, but in the middle of the last century people, at all events intellectual people, were not wont to express themselves with the brevity that is the rule today. A letter was a composition, not a corvée to be got through as speedily and as summarily as possible; and even a cursory examination of the great collection of

letters brought together and arranged by the diligence of her husband, Mr. J. W. Cross, will reveal pretty clearly that George Eliot wrote with the attention to style and effectiveness of expression natural to one conscious of a literary gift and desirous of exercising it.

However, there had been nothing in the sort of work on which she had been hitherto engaged to suggest that fiction would prove to be the sphere in which she was destined to excel. Even Mr. Herbert Spencer, who knew so many things, never, we may be sure, suspected what an important thing he was doing when he made George Henry Lewes and George Eliot acquainted with each other. In his contributions to philosophy he probably considered he had reared himself a monument more durable than bronze and never guessed that this meritorious young woman, on whom he was graciously pleased to bestow the honor of his friendship, would produce works destined to live long after the dust had settled pretty thickly upon the numerous volumes in which his own wisdom was enshrined. Philosophies, with whatever hopes conceived, with whatever ardor elaborated, often have a way of growing out of date. In this they resemble science whose "truths," deemed immutable on their first discovery, are perpetually giving place to fresh "truths," themselves fated to be superseded in their turn. The Newtonian science, unassail-

able as it seemed, has been seriously modified by Einstein, and he would be a bold man who would predict that Einstein will hold the field for more than a century hence. Truth, absolute truth, will only be attained when man has become the equal of God. Certainly it is not uncommon for some philosophers, both clerical and lay, to think they have attained that eminence. Some indeed there are who believe they have risen yet higher and presume to dictate to the Deity how He should act, and, depriving Him of His omnipotence, to make Him subservient to natural law; but these are, generally speaking, confined to universities, cathedral chapters or lunatic asylums.

It was only when George Eliot ceased to busy herself with philosophy, and addressed herself to the delineation of her fellow men and women, that her genius, as distinct from her talents, from her cleverness, was brought into play. Then, as it were, at a bound, she came into her true inheritance. And yet how easily the spark which was destined to break into so glorious a flame might have been extinguished. Another year in the society of the excellent Mr. Bray, or the omniscient Mr. Spencer, and the flowering time might have passed irrevocably by. It was George Henry Lewes who, doubtless by chance rather than by design, saved the situation. But it was touch and go. If the fire does not begin to

blaze in a woman at thirty-six, it is unlikely that it will ever blaze.

In May, 1856, George Eliot and Lewes found themselves at Ilfracombe, with which they were "enchanted." "I really think," she writes to the Brays, "it is the loveliest sea place I ever saw, from the combination of fine rocky coast with exquisite inland scenery." After Ilfracombe they went to Tenby "for the sake of making acquaintance with its molluscs and medusæ." There, under July twentieth she makes an entry in her Journal which contains a significant sentence. She has, she says, during her stay, done little *visible* work, adding that she did not remember ever feeling so strong in mind and body as she felt at that moment. "Mr. Chapman," she went on, "invites me to contribute to the 'Westminster' for this quarter. I am anxious to begin my fiction writing, and so am not inclined to undertake an article that will give me much trouble." It looked as if the *vita nuova* were at last about to open, that the bad old days of translating and writing dreary articles for dreary reviews were about to pass away. It had always been a vague dream of hers, she tells us, that some time or other she might write a novel, and the dream she did not conceal from her friends the Brays. Years before, one of them remarked in a letter to a friend, that George Eliot was looking very brilliant just then, "we

think she must be writing her novel." But she had never got further than an introductory chapter describing a Staffordshire village and the life of the neighboring farmhouses. The years passed on and she lost any hope that she would ever be able to write a novel, "just," she says, "as I desponded about everything else in my future life. I always thought I was deficient in dramatic power, both of construction and dialogue, but I felt I should be at my ease in the descriptive parts of a novel."

Lewes, though he too doubted her dramatic power, urged her to try her hand. The introductory chapter she had read over to him one evening when they were in Berlin, and he was struck with it as a piece of "concrete description." On their return to England he again encouraged her to make the attempt, and while they were at Tenby he urged her "to begin at once." She still hesitated. There was some hack work to be done, and to this she turned as to an anodyne, as to something that should dull the unrest that was stirring within her. "But one morning," she writes, "as I was thinking what should be the subject of my first story, my thoughts merged themselves into a dreamy doze, and I imagined myself writing a story of which the title was 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton.' "

She was about to come into her kingdom, she was on

the threshold of that other land across whose mysterious and invisible frontier she was now to pass, into the land of dreams, the land toward which she had, though she knew it not, been journeying for so long, the land out of whose shadowy distances she was to call up those forms, those faces which had been waiting there so long, waiting for the moment when, as with the wave of an enchanter's wand, she should summon them into being. This land was a kingdom rich and spacious, it was her heart and those who moved within it were faces she had loved long since. It was a world of dreams and imagination, woven upon a warp of memory, softened and transfigured by time. She was to put off the pretentious robe of philosophy and sterile controversy, in which she had labored so long; she was to see this world of hers with the eyes of a child and the heart of a woman, eyes that beheld and loved all that was beautiful and strange within it, a heart that throbbed in unison with all its sorrows and sufferings, pitying its weaknesses and errors, and smiling indulgently at its absurdities, noting and portraying, with insight and with love, the countryside and the habitations—cottage, farm and hall—in which the action of her stories was passed.

It was then at Tenby that inspiration came to her and took more definite shape than ever it had assumed before. And what a trifle it was that turned the scale. Lewes, she said, "distrusted—indeed disbelieved in—

my possession of any dramatic power. Still, he began to think that I might as well try some time what I could do in fiction . . . to see how far my mental power would go, towards the production of a novel. . . . He began to say very positively, 'You must try and write a story.' " It was well that, though "disbelieving in her dramatic power," he nevertheless urged her to make the attempt. It was the breath that turned the scale. Early that autumn—autumn was her favorite season of the year, when the chords of her nature seemed to vibrate most in harmony—she began *Amos Barton.* A little while afterward she read to Lewes the scene at Cross Farm. It completely dispelled his doubts as to her ability to write dialogue. And when, later, she read him the passage describing Milly's death, they both cried over it, "and then he came up and kissed me, saying, 'I think your pathos is better than your fun.' "

Not till then, we may imagine, did he really know George Eliot. Great writers, despite Flaubert, are self-revealing, and we may learn more of George Eliot in this single little story, imperfect though it be, than from a wilderness of biographical facts concerning her. So, too, it is possible to live in the closest material intimacy with some one whom we do not know until an unwonted emotion, such as a great sorrow, or a great happiness, lights up the hidden personality, as the sun shining from a rift in the clouds will light up and glorify

a landscape. An artist, whatever the medium in which he works, is after all a different being from those who do not serve the Muses. It is not a matter of intellect, still less of learning. Mr. Bray, with his phrenology and his philosophy, had demonstrated to his own complete satisfaction that Christianity was no longer to be seriously entertained by the enlightened. Herbert Spencer's knowledge was encyclopedic and his *Synthetic Philosophy* would be a most convincing explanation of the universe if the whole world consisted of Herbert Spencers. Fortunately, George Henry Lewes, like Anatole France, put no exaggerated faith in philosophy, and he would readily have endorsed the dictum of the latter that "philosophical systems are interesting only as psychical documents well adapted to enlighten the *savant* on the different conditions through which the human mind has passed." Thus, though his heredity and training were as different as they could well be from hers, he had an innate sympathy, being not merely an intellectual abstraction, but a man and an artist, for a mind that "has an occasional tenderness for old abuses . . . and a sigh for the departed shades of vulgar errors" and can revel "in regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new-painted, new-varnished efficiency, which will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and sections, but alas! no pictures."

CHAPTER VIII

So *Amos Barton* appeared, and George Eliot was fairly launched—though neither she nor Lewes knew it. The story exhibits, in full blow, all her characteristic defects and, at least in embryo, all her characteristic virtues. It is thickly sown with the pedantry, the pretentiousness, the pomposity of the painfully self-conscious and exceedingly diffident person; it exhibits in all its disastrous perfection the conceit of the very shy. George Eliot had just written (of course under her own name) an article on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," and *Amos Barton* was clearly intended to show that this writer at any rate was not silly, that she was indeed a very intellectual and superior person, capable of taking a broad and enlightened survey of the animalcula who inhabited the world with which she was familiar and who, poor purblind creatures, had not the least idea of the gifted soul that dwelled unguessed at in their midst. There is no conceit like the conceit of the diffident, no pride like the pride of the humble, just as there is no courage like the courage of the coward. George Eliot's conceit was of this brand; and here, in *Amos Barton,* it is displayed in all its nakedness.

Amos Barton is full of that most intolerable of all forms of writing, namely "fine writing," full of sentences which afflict one with a sense of real physical pain. And yet who, if he possessed any insight at all into such things, could fail to suspect that here, in this story by a writer hitherto unheard of, was at least the promise of that mysterious something which is at once as old as the hills and as fresh as the dawn—of genius? Even Blackwood was not wholly blind; which was strange indeed, since Blackwood was a publisher. Lewes at any rate had more than an inkling. Lewes was a gifted fellow and in a matter of this kind worth a whole universe of Brays and Spencers. Lewes was an artist; and he and his "wife," if they were not exactly poor, probably found that *boucler le budget* was no easy matter. No doubt it was the artist in him that was first illumined with enthusiasm, but no doubt it was the poor *père de famille* with two wives and three boys to support who foresaw there might be money in it. Philosophy, science, articles in the *Westminster* and the *Leader* were all very well. They maintained one's reputation, without resulting in any noteworthy addition to the bank balance. They did not appeal and could not attain to the "grand public." Molluscs and Medusæ were well enough in laboratories or country vicarages, but men and women, their sorrows and sufferings, their joys and

triumphs,—this was, as the Americans say, a different "proposition." Lewes saw the possibilities, first in the sphere of art, for art was this adventurer's first love, and secondly in the sphere of finance, for it was, to say the least of it, devilish inconvenient to be short of money.

Well, *Amos Barton* was a success—certainly a literary success. It was full of faults, but it was a success. It was a success for the simple reason, the good and sufficient reason, that George Eliot was a genius. It would not do for me, nor, unless you happen to be a genius, would it do for you, to perpetrate the kind of thing which George Eliot carried off with impunity. This for example:

"'Well,' suggested John, humbly, 'you should wet the bottom of the *duree* [tureen] a bit, to hold it from slippin'.'

"'Wet your granny!' returned the cook; a retort which she probably regarded in the light of a *reductio ad absurdum,* and which in fact reduced John to silence."

No one could take exception to the dialogue of which the above forms a part. But the comment, "a retort which she probably regarded," et cetera, it is hard to read without wincing. The dialogue is the dialogue of George Eliot, the comment is the comment of "that saint Mary Ann Evans" the blameless pupil of the

Misses Franklin. Too often one is irritated by these efforts to "show off," to demonstrate by a sesquipedalian grandiloquence that the author is by no means to be confounded with the members of that inept and frivolous sisterhood who purvey silly fiction for the consumption of a still sillier public. The scientist and the philosopher were eventually beaten or at least rendered innocuous by the artist in her, but the battle was a protracted one with swaying fortunes. Even when the artist seems decisively to have gained the day, a shell from a scientific battery masked on some distant ridge would drop an explosive in the very middle of the picture.

In *Amos Barton* the grandiloquence is frequent and terrible; she finds it so hard to forget herself, so hard to resign the pen into the hand of her soul, her spirit, her genius or whatever we may call it, and suffer *that* to do the writing. "The walls," she says, of the restored Shepperton Church, ". . . are smooth and innutrient as the summit of the Rev. Amos Barton's head, after ten years of baldness and supererogatory soap." Why "supererogatory"? There is no reason except that it is a rather learned word, a good mouthful. But when we leave the unhappy regions of "innutrient" craniums, and "supererogatory" soap and come to a scene that awakens her memories and stirs her affections, a scene that comes upon her mental vision more full of life and color than

when she beheld it with her bodily eye, the effect is far different: the scene grows warm and bright, the language simple, the words of Latin origin fewer. For example:

"You have a vague idea of a milch cow as probably a white plaster animal standing in a butterman's window, and you know nothing of the sweet history of genuine cream, such as Miss Gibbs's: how it was this morning in the udders of the large sleek beasts, as they stood lowing a patient entreaty under the milking-shed; how it fell with a pleasant rhythm into Betty's pail, sending a delicious incense into the cool air; how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed whiteness, ready for the skimming-dish which transferred it to Miss Gibbs's glass cream-jug."

There speaks the true George Eliot. She had forgotten the world, forgotten her audience when she wrote that. She had for the moment thrown off her besetting weakness of self-consciousness, the distressing anxiety to appear to advantage in the public eye.

She was to do better later on. The note that sounded here sweet and true was to gain a strength and an amplitude that were destined one day, and no very distant day either, to bring her to the forefront and

to make her free of that great company of creative artists whose work neither time, nor the vagaries of fashion, nor changed conditions of life, can wholly dethrone or permanently obscure.

Meanwhile Blackwood was pleased, but not dithyrambic. "I am happy to say," he reported to Lewes, "that I think your friend's reminiscences of Clerical Life will do." The death of Milly, over which Lewes and George Eliot had cried together, Lewes kissing her and saying he thought her pathos even better than her fun, affected Blackwood very much. But he was not carried off his feet, not by any means. He could make no decided proposition for the publication of a series in his magazine until he had seen what was to come.

This struck Lewes as decidedly disappointing, a damning with faint praise. He wrote protestingly to Blackwood saying that it struck him as being fresher than any story he had read for a long while and as exhibiting, in a high degree, "that faculty which I find to be the rarest of all—viz., the dramatic ventriloquism."

Whether or not Blackwood also came to recognize the presence of that mysterious quality does not appear, but he wrote reassuringly, explaining the cautiousness of his judgment by observing very sensibly that "Criticism would assume a much soberer tone were critics compelled *seriously to act* whenever they expressed an

opinion." Nevertheless, even in those days the gentle art of puffing was not neglected by the publishing fraternity, and it might be interesting to compare his private verdict on the work with that of the advertisement announcing its publication of the work. The upshot was that Blackwood undertook to publish *Amos Barton* in his magazine without unavoidable delay. "I agree with you," he says, "that there is great freshness of style" (he is discreetly silent regarding the "dramatic ventriloquism") and added that if it would stimulate the author to go on with the other tales with more spirit, he would publish *Amos* at once. He was blocked up for December, but he "could start him in January." This was very heartening. "Your letter," writes Lewes in reply, "has greatly restored the shaken confidence of my friend, who is unusually sensitive, and, unlike most writers, is more anxious about *excellence* than about appearing in print." And this is significant: "He is consequently afraid of failure, though not afraid of obscurity; and by failure he would understand that which I suspect most writers would be apt to consider as success —so high is his ambition." Which means that the pseudonymous author mediated no middle flight and that, despite the protestation, obscurity would be anything but welcome.

The heightened expressions of approval with which

publishers regard works when once they appear on their lists, is shown in Blackwood's letter to George Eliot sending her a copy of the January number of the magazine. Compared with his guarded language to Lewes, his encomiums are enthusiastic. "It gives me great pleasure to begin the number with 'Amos,' and I put him in that position because his merits well entitle him to it. . . . It is a long time since I have read anything so fresh, so humorous and so touching. The style is capital, conveying so much in so few words," which perhaps is open to doubt. Expressed in terms of money, this approval amounted to fifty guineas, a check for which was enclosed. This, being about two-thirds of the fee paid weekly to a well-known critic of these days for about eight hundred words in a popular newspaper, may be regarded as generous.

It is easy to be wise after the event, easy to find reasons for detecting what one knows to be a fact. But admitting all this to the full, it seems strange now that there could ever have existed much doubt as to the sex of the author of *Amos Barton.* Perhaps the formal elaborate tone which writers adopted in those days may go some way to account for the mystery going so long unsolved. But perhaps it is an error to speak of mystery in this way. There was of course doubt and speculation as to the author's identity since "George Eliot" was

acknowledged to be a pseudonym. There was little or none as to the author's sex. The author was a man. "The men at the club," writes Blackwood, "seem to have mingled their tears and their tumblers together. It will be curious if you should be a member and be hearing your own praises." Others would have it quite definitely that he was a Cambridge man and a cleric. Dickens alone penetrated the secret. He was quite certain the writer was a woman. To-day the sole presumption in favor of a masculine authorship for the *Scenes of Clerical Life* would be their freedom from impropriety. The evidence as to the sex of the author is of two kinds, direct and indirect. The latter consists in the little additions she makes by way of comment on a piece of dialogue or description or narrative. And in proportion as the preceding passage is simple and direct, the comment is grandiose and polysyllabic.

"On Mr. Furness's left you see Mr. Pugh, another young curate, of much less marked characteristics. He had not published any poems; he had not even been plucked; he had neat black whiskers and a pale complexion; read prayers and a sermon twice every Sunday, and might be seen any day sallying forth on his parochial duties in a white tie, a well-brushed hat, a perfect suit of black, and well-polished boots—an equipment which he probably supposed hieroglyphically to repre-

sent the spirit of Christianity to the parishioners of Whittlecombe.' There is as little mistaking a woman's walk as there is the walk of her sentences. The whole *mouvement de la phrase,* as the French say, is feminine. Then suddenly at the end she seems to realize this, and makes a valiant effort to write something that shall show how superior she is to her subject, something of which Mr. Bray and even Mr. Herbert Spencer would approve and so she writes that terrible sentence—"an equipment which he probably supposed hieroglyphically to represent," et cetera.

And now behold, a miracle. How, exactly, it is to be accounted for is a mystery. Perhaps it was due to the confidence, to the feeling of well-being, mental and physical, that is born of success. For, despite its blemishes, despite the pedantry and sententiousness by which it is all too frequently marred, *Amos Barton* had won favor among critics well qualified to pass judgment. In those days, indeed, when pretentiousness and pompous formality of style were rather the vogue, these blemishes, so conspicuous to modern eyes, may have passed comparatively unnoticed, or even have been accounted a virtue. Every trade or occupation has its jargon, and just as there is a legal jargon, a medical jargon, a commercial jargon, so there is, alas, a literary jargon. From the influence of this latter, which if allowed to go un-

checked, overspreads and smothers the fine flower of the imagination like a sort of verbal elephantiasis, George Eliot was never finally and completely emancipated. She could never wholly forget that she was a literary person, consequently except when in her moments of pure inspiration she became unconscious of herself, there is a hint and often more than a hint of something stilted and didactic in her style, a bequest she owed, perhaps, to good Miss Rebecca Franklin, who, as we know, always expressed herself with such immaculate perfection. Anatole France has said somewhere or other, that the only chance an author has to write well, is to write for himself and the Muses. It was not always, by many a polysyllabic page, that George Eliot wrote for herself and the Muses. Too often she addressed herself to the Mr. Brays and the Herbert Spencers of her day, seeking, not so much to utter the emotion or depict the vision within her, as to express herself in language which should find favor with that cultured and superior section of the public who subscribed to the *Westminster Review*.

But there were times when inspiration conquered, and when, carried away by her theme, she wrote with perfect simplicity, with utter naturalness, or the appearance of naturalness. This naturalness is doubtless the outcome of the highest art, but the art is not visible, one is con-

scious of the sort of satisfaction that comes of observing the manners of the perfectly nurtured man or woman whose effortless ease and grace of bearing contrast markedly with the studied endeavor to say and do "the correct thing" that marks the behavior of the slightly under-bred.

The miracle, to which we have referred, was *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*—the one flawless thing George Eliot ever wrote. *Silas Marner* is usually spoken of as George Eliot's most artistically perfect production; and indeed *Silas Marner,* because it contains that immortal scene in the Rainbow Inn, can never be discarded, for that scene is Shakespearean; but a large part is written in a style that only too clearly suggests the honeyed piety of a serial story in a parish magazine. It is all very pretty and very touching, and as a story it has unity and finish—it is *teres atque rotundus,* it is well rounded off, but it is drawn not from experience but from the fancy, and is in consequence pale and unconvincing beside *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* which are autobiographical and impress us with their convincing authenticity. The experiences in those books were lived, the story of *Silas Marner*—and of *Romola, Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch* were "made up." But *Mr. Gilfil* contains not a single weak expression, not a single trite reflection; it is pure gold, and suddenly to achieve perfec-

tion in this way, to triumph thus swiftly and completely over deep-rooted and inveterate faults is surely nothing less than to work a miracle.

Many books have been published on English humor, many anthologies giving choice specimens of that essentially and almost exclusively English quality. I do not know whether any of them draw upon the opening chapter of *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story.* If they do not, they err conspicuously. It shall be quoted here.

"When old Mr. Gilfil died, thirty years ago, there was general sorrow in Shepperton; . . . All the farmers' wives brought out their black bombasines; and Mrs. Jennings, at the Wharf, by appearing the first Sunday after Mr. Gilfil's death in her salmon-coloured ribbons and green shawl, excited the severest remark. To be sure, Mrs. Jennings was a new-comer, and town-bred, so that she could hardly be expected to have very clear notions of what was proper; but as Mrs. Higgins observed in an undertone to Mrs. Parrot when they were coming out of church, 'Her husband, who'd been born i' the parish, might ha' told her better.' An unreadiness to put on black on all available occasions, as too great an alacrity in putting it off, argued, in Mrs. Higgins's opinion, a dangerous levity of character, and an unnatural insensibility to the essential fitness of things.

" 'Some folks can't a-bear to put off their colours,' she

remarked; 'but that was never the way i' *my* family. Why, Mrs. Parrot, from the time I was married till Mr. Higgins died, nine year ago come Candlemas, I niver was out o' black two year together!'

" 'Ah,' said Mrs. Parrot, who was conscious of inferiority in this respect, 'there isn't many families as have had so many deaths as yours, Mrs. Higgins.'

"Mrs. Higgins, who was an elderly widow 'well left,' reflected with complacency that Mrs. Parrot's observation was no more than just, and that Mrs. Jennings very likely belonged to a family which had had no funerals to speak of."

Those who know the country and are familiar with the mentality of its inhabitants are aware what cause for pride they derive from "this sad pre-eminence of woe."

Mr. Gilfil himself, whose story follows, belongs to a type of country parson which no other writer has portrayed with such loving skill as George Eliot. He has many points in common with Parson Irwine in *Adam Bede,* and Parson Irwine is a creation that will live for all time. Yet Mr. Gilfil has this advantage over Mr. Irwine. He has known sorrow. The iron of an unappeasable and irremediable anguish has entered into his soul. Those who know the details of his story will not need to be reminded of it, those who do not had better learn for themselves; for it is altogether too delicate

and lovely a thing to submit to analysis; a clumsy or a careless touch and the gossamer texture would be shattered. The Reverend Maynard Gilfil had passed through the crucible of suffering when he was still a young man, but the experience had not soured or hardened him. His parishioners, old and young, rich and poor, loved and respected him. Cultivating his own glebe, he was himself a farmer; he could share the hopes and enter into the anxieties of his people. He was one of them, even in speech. "It was his habit to approximate his accent and mode of speech to theirs, doubtless because he thought it a mere frustration of the purposes of language to talk of 'shear-hogs' and 'ewes' to men who habitually said 'sharrags' and 'yowes.' " The reason for his popularity is well exemplified in his attitude toward Dame Fripp who "kept leeches" and "drove a brisk trade in lollipop with epicurean urchins," yet notwithstanding these and other sources of income—she had " 'property' supposed to yield her no less than half-a-crown a-week . . . the shameless old woman constantly pleaded poverty, and begged for scraps at Mrs. Hackit's, who, though she always said Mrs. Fripp was 'as false as two folks' and no better than a miser and a heathen, had yet a leaning towards her as an old neighbour. . . .

"Mr. Gilfil, riding leisurely in top-boots and spurs

from doing duty at Knebley one warm Sunday afternoon, observed" Dame Fripp "sitting in a dry ditch near her cottage, and by her side a large pig, who, with that ease and confidence belonging to perfect friendship, was lying with his head in her lap, and making no effort to play the agreeable beyond an occasional grunt.

" 'Why, Mrs. Fripp,' said the Vicar, 'I didn't know you had such a fine pig. You'll have some rare flitches at Christmas!'

" 'Eh, God forbid! My son gev him me two 'ear ago, an' he's been company to me iver sin'. I couldn't find i' my heart to part wi'm, if I niver knowed the taste o' bacon-fat again.'

" 'Why, he'll eat his head off, and yours too. How can you go on keeping a pig, and making nothing by him?'

" 'Oh, he picks a bit hisself wi' rootin', and I dooant mind doing wi'out to gi' him summat. A bit o' coompany's meat an' drink too, an' he follers me about, and grunts when I spake to'm, just like a Christian.'

"Mr. Gilfil laughed, and I am obliged to admit that he said good-bye to Dame Fripp without asking her why she had not been to church, or making the slightest effort for her spiritual edification. But the next day he ordered his man David to take her a great piece of bacon, with a message, saying, the parson wanted to

make sure that Mrs. Fripp would know the taste of bacon-fat again."

That is a passage which, of its kind, is matchless. If there is another writer who could get quite that atmosphere and that accent, I should like to know where he is to be found. And yet some of the wiseacres of the day, seeking to penetrate the author's incognito hazarded the guess that it was—Bulwer Lytton! So much for the penetration of the critics. One would think that if in the whole range of contemporary writers there was one who might be safely ruled out, one who could certainly never have conceived or portrayed such a character as Mr. Gilfil, that one was the author of *Ernest Maltravers* and *The Last Days of Pompeii.*

For a time then the stream of inspiration, the philosophic impurities and scientific garbage which had clogged and impeded it as it broke from its source, had been swept away, and it flowed on, pure and unalloyed Castalian.

The gifts of observation and humor which the foregoing extract reveals, the skill in narrative displayed by the story to which it is the introduction—these are not all the qualities to which George Eliot can lay claim. She can rise above her subject, and looking down upon the personages in her little drama, on the little fragment of the great mundane movement upon which she has

directed the ray of her genius, she can sum up and express that "criticism of life" to which it is the prerogative of every imaginative writer to give utterance, whether his chosen medium be poetry or prose. This power of "philosophizing" her story, using the word in its most liberal sense, imparts a moral significance to her work and invests it with a quality that lifts it far above the production of mere story-mongers. She could read deep into the human heart, she felt as perhaps no other woman has felt the sense of tears in mortal things. Here is a reflection on the anguish of Caterina, the tragic little figure who was cast aside by the man she loved and found her lot almost too bitter to endure.

"While this poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. The stars were rushing in their eternal courses; the tides swelled to the level of the last expectant weed; the sun was making brilliant day to busy nations on the other side of the swift earth. The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope; the great ships were laboring over the waves; the toiling eagerness of commerce, the fierce spirit of revolution, were only ebbing in brief rest; and sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little

Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest centre of quivering life in the water-drop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty."

CHAPTER IX

THE Leweses were staying at Jersey, when a letter came from Archer Gurney. It was addressed to "the author of 'Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story'" and had been sent on by Blackwood. Lewes, who read it first, took it up to her, saying with intense joy, "Her fame is beginning!" "If I mistake not," says Gurney, "your muse of invention is no hackneyed one, and your style is too peculiar to allow of your being confounded with any of the already well-known writers of the day." In which he displayed more penetration than those who would "confound" her with Bulwer. And he comes near the truth when he says, "Your great and characteristic charm is, to my mind, Nature." That is well said; but that characteristic charm, alas, is too often obscured by that no less characteristic defect of which Gurney seemed to have a premonition, for he goes on to ask these questions: "Will you always remain equally natural? That is the doubt. Will the fear of the critic, or the public, or the literary world, which spoils almost every one, never master you? Will you always write to please yourself, and preserve the true independence which seems to mark a real suprem-

acy of intellect?" Those questions are well asked, and the answer is that those sins to which he refers will beset her intermittently, and that in consequence, Nature, "her great and characteristic charm," will suffer considerably from time to time.

The "grand" style of writing, the priggish and pretentious magniloquence which from time to time afflicts her, is the outcome of nervousness. It is akin to the sort of stiffness of gait a man involuntarily assumes when he is conscious that the eyes of a crowd of people are directed wholly upon him. George Eliot suffered terribly from nerves and from all the evils—anxiety, depression and, above all, dyspepsia—which disordered or hyper-sensitive nerves entail. Like many, perhaps most, "conceited" people, George Eliot was inwardly very much given to despondency, very easily depressed, and very much inclined to under-rate her own powers. Excessive timidity would be the last thing which a casual or careless observer would suspect in George Eliot who, from all accounts, was not a little calculated to inspire that quality in others. Yet there is no doubt, I think, that she furnished a definite example of what in these days is known as the "inferiority complex." From the pose a man assumes toward the world at large, we may deduce what he really is, which is generally something very different from the pose. George Eliot was too diffident

of her own powers to have much confidence that she would ever be able to write a successful work of fiction. But she was prepared to find consolation for a failure which she considered probable, in the reflection that she was too intellectual, too superior, to secure the approval of the general reading public. She was not to be confounded with those female producers of "Silly Novels" on whose failings she had so severely animadverted. If she failed to find favor with the mob, she would at all events not lose it with her Herbert Spencer.

In short, though it was her dearest ambition, George Eliot did not think she could write fiction. When, therefore, *Amos Barton* proved the success it did, no one was more surprised than herself. Now, at last, the frost that had bound her heart and numbed her brow, was beginning to melt. The winter was departing, the flowers were beginning to bloom in the land. In the period of elation which followed, all the chords of her being were in harmony. Her mental exhilaration reacted on her physical state. She was cheerful and confident. Her dyspepsia had departed with her depression. In a word she was *herself* when she wrote *Mr. Gilfil,* and being herself, without the necessity of appearing anything else, with no need *se faire valoir,* to force the note or to play to the stalls, she wrote, as Mr. Gurney said, to please herself and she wrote—a masterpiece.

Blackwood had written her an encouraging letter from London saying that he heard nothing but approval of *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story* and thus she writes in reply:

"Pleasant letters like yours are the best possible stimulus to an author's powers, and if I don't write better and better, the fault will certainly not lie in my editor, who seems to have been created in pre-established harmony with the organization of a susceptible contributor."

But it is to George Henry Lewes that is due all the credit for bringing forth these powers which but for him might and probably would never have been awakened. There is no atmosphere more chilling than that of professional superiority such as that in which she had dwelt with that very amateur philosopher, Mr. Bray, with that overwhelming intellect of Mr. Herbert Spencer in the background. Against the effects of this environment, the genius of George Eliot was always struggling, struggling with varied success. In *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story* it won a brief but complete triumph. It is one of the small perfect things of literature. Sir Leslie Stephen, with whose pronouncements it is not always easy to concur, says of it—and surely here at least he commands agreement—that it "appears to be almost faultless, and as admirable a specimen of the literary genus to which it belongs as was ever written."

The author's incognito was still of course religiously preserved and the identity of this mysterious new writer, this new planet that had swum so unerringly into the literary firmament, was known only to George Henry Lewes. I confess to harboring in this connection what is perhaps a feeling of unworthy and un-Christian satisfaction, and it is this: some day that identity will be revealed and Mary Ann Evans will stand before the world as the author not only of these *Scenes of Clerical Life* but of those other creations which were destined to take the English-speaking world by storm. I like to think how, when the day of revelation comes, those worthy but rather patronizing friends of hers, the Brays and their highly intellectual circle, will gasp and rub their eyes, and with what surprised and sudden completeness they will have to readjust the perspective of their little world, and with what a shock they will learn that, in the ex-stone-mason's and carpenter's excellent, persevering and quite intelligent little daughter, they had been entertaining a genius unawares.

Mr. Gilfil's Love Story was followed at a very brief interval by *Janet's Repentance,* which tells of the martyrdom of the Reverend Mr. Tryan, an Evangelical clergyman. In the persecution of this meek and worthy man, the chief part was played by Robert Dempster, a brutal, bullying, brandy-swilling but highly capable at-

torney, Robert Dempster, whose antagonism had been aroused by the pious zeal and reforming tendencies of Mr. Tryan. Janet was Dempster's wife, and at first she had joined enthusiastically with those whose aim it was to make Mr. Tryan's life a burden to him, to defeat his schemes and if possible to drive him from the parish. But in no long time Dempster, who was a perfect example of the coarse, domineering, drunken ruffian, turns his attentions to Janet herself, reviling and assaulting her whenever he was in liquor, which soon came to be nearly always. One night after a particularly violent quarrel, he thrust her out-of-doors. This is the culmination of the scene: "She heard his heavy step on the stairs; she saw the slowly advancing light. Then she saw the tall massive figure, and the heavy face, now fierce with drunken rage. He had nothing but the candle in his hand. He set it down on the table, and advanced close to the bed.

" 'So you think you'll defy me, do you? We'll see how long that will last. Get up, madam; out of bed this instant!'

"In the close presence of this dreadful man—of this huge crushing force, armed with savage will—poor Janet's desperate defiance all forsook her, and her terrors came back. Trembling, she got up, and stood helpless in her night-dress before her husband.

"He seized her with his heavy grasp by the shoulder, and pushed her before him

" 'I'll cool your hot spirit for you! I'll teach you to brave me!'

"Slowly he pushed her along before him, down-stairs and through the passage, where a small oil-lamp was still flickering. What was he going to do to her? She thought every moment he was going to dash her before him on the ground. But she gave no scream—she only trembled.

"He pushed her on to the entrance, and held her firmly in his grasp while he lifted the latch of the door. Then he opened the door a little way, thrust her out, and slammed it behind her.

"For a short space it seemed like a deliverance to Janet. The harsh north-east wind, that blew through her thin night-dress, and sent her long heavy black hair streaming, seemed like the breath of pity after the grasp of that threatening monster. But soon the sense of release from an overpowering terror gave way before the sense of the fate that had really come upon her.

"This then was what she had been travelling towards through her long years of misery! Not yet death. Oh! if she had been brave enough for it, death would have been better. The servants slept at the back of the house; it was impossible to make them hear, so that they might

let her in again quietly, without her husband's knowledge. And she would not have tried. He had thrust her out, and it should be for ever.

"There would have been dead silence in Orchard Street but for the whistling of the wind and the swirling of the March dust on the pavement. Thick clouds covered the sky; every door was closed; every window was dark. No ray of light fell on the tall white figure that stood in lonely misery on the doorstep."

It was now, after this, that Janet turned for comfort and hope to Mr. Tryan who, until now she had so grievously persecuted. Overworked, ill-housed, ill-fed, dogged by illness, he was evidently not long for this world. But as his bodily strength declined the soul within him seemed to shine with a more compelling radiance. For this Mr. Tryan was, in the true sense of the word, a "good" man, far removed from that soft emasculate piety which a large section of his parishioners, with Dempster at their head, had thought they recognized in him. He knew the weaknesses and the temptations which assail his fellow men for he himself had succumbed to them. He himself had sinned and suffered. All sin is irremediable. We can never make up to the man or woman we have wronged, for the pain or disaster which we have inflicted upon them. What is done can not be undone. All that remains to us is ex-

piation: to endeavor by a life of self-denial and service to compensate, to make up by increasing the welfare of others, for the ill which carelessly or deliberately we have wrought in the irreclaimable past. Tryan in his youth had wronged a young woman. That woman was dead, beyond the reach of joy or sorrow. He had wrecked her life and wrecked his own. But out of the shattered remnants of his own he had set to work to gather up the fragments that remained. And behold the gathering was a rich one, for it included ere he was called away by death from his labors, the love and respect of those who had mocked and jeered him and of them not the least, was Janet Dempster. "We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours." Tryan had reaped what he had sown; but because his heart had been made clean within him, he was possessed of a power of gentleness that in the end proved victorious over the bitterest and most stubborn of his adversaries.

The jeering mob that had once stormed and hooted at Mr. Tryan as he made his way along the streets to his church stood, on a later day in a crowd no less dense, to offer him the unavailing tribute of their homage.

"Once more only did the Evangelical curate pass up Orchard Street followed by a train of friends; once

more only was there a crowd assembled to witness his entrance through the church gates. But that second time no voice was heard above a whisper, and the whispers were words of sorrow and blessing. That second time, Janet Dempster was not looking on in scorn and merriment; her eyes were worn with grief and watching, and she was following her beloved friend and pastor to the grave."

George Eliot had a marked inability to differentiate her good work from her—less good. It is a defect not uncommon among geniuses. That she should have a tenderness toward *Amos Barton,* the tenderness of a mother toward her first-born, is not unnatural. *Amos Barton* had opened the gates for her to the Land of Promise, he was the sign under which she had thrown off the fetters of arid and barren philosophy and begun that *vita nuova* that was to bring her happiness and fame. It was natural then that she should exhibit a predilection for *Amos Barton.* But how she could have imagined that *Janet's Repentance,* with its crudities, its concessions to the spirit of popular melodrama, was comparable to *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story,* passes one's comprehension. It is but another proof of the incalculable quality of genius. Mere talent can be relied on to maintain a certain level of excellence, easy, uniform and satisfying. Take such a writer as Mr. W. J. Locke for ex-

ample. His characteristics are familiar, his workmanship is uniformly sound and he goes along on the level, not a particularly high one, but certainly not a low one. He may be relied upon to have a good story to tell and to tell it with skill and considerable charm. He is an old hand at the game. His readers expect good sound stuff and get it. "The latest Locke story"—that is how his publishers announce the works which fall from him with the ineluctable punctuality which governs the stars in their courses or the revolution of the seasons. That is an example of talent. Mr. Locke is never in any doubt about his work. He knows right enough when it is up to the mark and fit to go out of the workshop with his trade-mark on it. Genius, on the other hand, has periods of insight and blindness of an intensity quite foreign to Mr. Locke who, happily for him, knows nothing of that agony of spirit which attends the birth of works of genius. Talent is sure of itself and knows well enough when it has done what it set out to do. Genius is subject to violent alternations of hope and despair and betrays a pathetic inability to distinguish its triumphs from its failures.

Janet's Repentance is a case in point. Blackwood did not like it, and George Eliot launched out into a long defense of the plot, the characters and her treatment of them. It was all irrelevant. The simple fact was that as

a work of art it was second rate, and that, coming as it did immediately after *Mr. Gilfil* which is as nearly perfect as one can expect human things to be, its second-rateness was the more apparent.

The romance, the suffering, the tragedy that mark the lives of seemingly drab, humdrum, commonplace people, the heroic patience and self-abnegation which sometimes underlie the most ordinary, every-day and apparently colorless existence is a common enough theme with novelists to-day, and the fashion came as in a reaction against the unrealities of a romanticism of which people had begun to weary. Almost at the same time as George Eliot was depicting the life of the very undistinguished inhabitants of Shepperton and Milby, Gustav Flaubert was finding, in the no less commonplace inhabitants on Yonville-l'Abbaye, the dramatis personæ for one of the greatest tragedies in literature. The material in both cases was the same, but how different the treatment! How widely and in what manner it was different it will be interesting in its proper place later on to consider. At the moment let it suffice to say that in *Madame Bovary* Flaubert created a world as to the reality of which we entertain no doubts. All his characters, those that play the largest and those that play the smallest parts in his drama, affect us with a sense of vivid and convincing reality. They are created *en chair et en os;*

we know them, they are living concrete figures as familiar to us as our neighbors, as the people whom we see and to whom we talk day by day. In her attempt to achieve this sense of reality, George Eliot is only partly successful. Some of her characters, and those the major ones, take on the attributes not so much of individuals as of types; they are collections, fascicules of qualities, abstractions, rather than beings of flesh and blood. Consequently the general effect left on the mind is one of patchiness, of a world where some, indeed, of the characters are intensely real, such, for example, as Mrs. Poyser, and others shadows, like the figures shown on a screen, creatures of two dimensions. This we may imagine, or something like it, was at the back of Blackwood's criticism. He found the characters not true to life. Dempster in particular is heavily overdrawn, and Mr. Tryan is but a compendium of the Evangelical virtues and as little of a man as Tennyson's King Arthur.

It may be that if that be true of *Janet's Repentance* it is likewise true of *Mr. Gilfil;* they are both fundamentally unreal, the only difference being that Maynard Gilfil is a compendium of the virtues, and Robert Dempster of the vices. With this I do not agree. Mr. Gilfil is real, though the reality has been idealized. He is a real person with a touch of the ideal. Robert Dempster never was real. He was misconceived and misbegotten

from the outset, and his conduct and the tragedy that results from it lose half their effect because the illusion of reality is not convincingly created. *Mr. Gilfil* was an inspiration; *Janet's Repentance* was manufactured. But a factitiously melodramatic style is not necessarily unpopular. There are novelists, women novelists to-day, whose books sell in tens, nay in hundreds of thousands and whose melodrama is a great deal cruder than that of George Eliot's *Janet's Repentance*. But the melodrama of one age is not the melodrama of another. How many would weep to-day over *East Lynne*, which caused such rivers of tears to flow a generation or so ago? Nevertheless Blackwood reports "that an elderly clergyman" has written to him to say that *Janet's Repentance* is excellent while Mrs. Nutt's rector "cried over the story like a child."

The year 1857 had been a momentous and a memorable one for George Eliot, and as it drew to its close she made two significant and touching entries in her Journal. On December nineteenth she wrote: "Alone this evening with very thankful, solemn thoughts—feeling the great and unhoped-for blessings that have been given me in life. This last year, especially, has been marked by inward progress and outward advantages. In the spring George's 'History of Philosophy' appeared in the new edition; his 'Sea-side Studies' have been written

with much enjoyment, and met with much admiration and now they are on the verge of being published with bright prospects. Blackwood has also accepted his 'Physiology of Common Life'; the 'Goethe' has passed into its third German edition; and best of all, G's head is well. I have written the 'Scenes of Clerical Life,'—my first book; and though we are uncertain still whether it will be a success as a separate publication, I have had much sympathy from my readers in 'Blackwood' and feel a deep satisfaction in having done a bit of faithful work that will perhaps remain like a primrose root in the hedgerow, and gladden and chasten human hearts in years to come."

George Eliot did not suffer her mind to lie fallow. In addition to her literary activities and her correspondence, which was voluminous, she read continuously and eagerly. In this month of December, 1857, for example, we find such entries as these in her Journal:

"Finished the 'Agamemnon' to-day. In the evenings of late we have been reading Harriet Martineau's 'Sketch of the British Empire in India' and are now following it up with Macaulay's article on Clive and Hastings. We have lately read Harriet Martineau's Introduction to the 'History of the Peace,' " and then two days later, "I am reading 'Die Familie' by Riehl, forming the third volume of the series, the first two of which,

'Land und Volk' and 'Die Bürgerliche Gesellschaft,' I reviewed for the 'Westminster.' " And yet again, "I have finished 'Die Familie' by Riehl—a delightful book. I am in the 'Choephoræ' now. In the evenings we are reading 'History of the Thirty Years' Peace' and Béranger." With Béranger, as might have been expected she was "thoroughly disappointed."

When she says "we are reading," it was Lewes who read aloud while she listened. They are still lovers, and lovers they were destined to remain. Lewes, who had been in his day something of a *butineur,* appears to have had no further temptation to roam. There was something idyllic about their life in common, the intercourse, unmarred it seems by even a shadow of misunderstanding, between this strangely ugly but gifted little man and his plain featured and still more gifted companion. They are like two children playing with toys. Only his toys are facts and theories; hers are visions and memories. But facts and theories have a way of growing out of date, or commonplace. Being solid material things, in the long run they are rubbed smooth and worn away by Time. It is only the impalpable, the invisible, that may elude the tooth of the Devourer. Were it not for *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss,* who now would know or care to know anything of George Henry Lewes? Philosophies pass, and facts for all their stub-

bornness are but mortal. Dreams, so they be beautiful, endure for ever, for "they are as the air, invulnerable."

The year 1857 had been a momentous one for George Eliot and on the last night of it she makes an entry in her diary. The passing of another year carries with it more than a hint of sadness, more than a shadow of solemnity. No doubt it is foolish, irrational, the sort of gaingiving that would trouble a woman. It is time for looking back on the resolutions we have broken and forward to others which we shall not keep. Christmas Day, the lovers, who needed no other society for their happiness, spent together. "George and I spent this lovely day together—lovely as a clear spring day"; and then six days later she adds: "The dear old year is gone, with all its *Weben* and *Streben.* Yet not gone either: for what I have suffered and enjoyed in it remains to me an everlasting possession, while my soul's life remains. This time last year I was alone, as I am now, and dear George was at Vernon Hill. I was writing the introduction to 'Mr. Gilfil's Love Story.' What a world of thoughts and feelings since then! My life has deepened unspeakably during the last year; I feel a greater capacity for moral and intellectual enjoyment; a more acute sense of my deficiencies in the past; a more solemn desire to be faithful to coming duties than I remember at any former period of my life. And my happiness has deepened

too: the blessedness of a perfect love and union grows daily. . . . Few women, I fear, have had such reason as I have to think the long sad years of youth were worth living for the sake of middle age. Our prospects are very bright too. I am writing my new novel. G. is full of his 'Physiology of Common Life.' He has just finished editing Johnston, for which he is to have 100 guineas, and we have both encouragement to think that our books just coming out, 'Sea-side Studies' and 'Scenes of Clerical Life' will be well received. So good-bye, dear 1857."

CHAPTER X

If 1857 had been a year largely of promise, 1858 was to usher in a period of triumphant achievement. The *Scenes of Clerical Life* had scored an undoubted *succès d'estime*. Dickens had written her an enthusiastic letter. "The exquisite truth and delicacy, both of the humor and the pathos of these stories, I have never seen the like of." And then he goes on to refer to his doubts or rather to his certainty as to the sex of the author. Had it not been for the name on the title-page he would "have been strongly disposed to address the writer as a woman. I have observed," he goes on, ". . . such womanly touches in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself mentally so like a woman since the world began."

The Times reviewed the book in "a highly favorable notice" which had caught Lewes' eye quite accidentally. Returning home after a week's visit to Vernon Hill he had asked a fellow-traveler in the railway carriage to be so good as to allow him a glance at *The Times* and

there, as he turned its pages, he came across the review "and felt quite agitated and tremulous."

J. A. Froude, writing from Northdown House, Bideford, thanks her "most sincerely" for the delight which the book had given him. "I do not know," says Froude, "whether I am addressing a young man or an old—a clergyman or a layman. . . . But at any rate, should business or pleasure bring you into this part of the world, pray believe that you will find a warm welcome if you will accept our hospitality." Next an effusion from Mrs. Carlyle who thanks her—or rather him—she begins her letter "Dear Sir"—"for a surprise, a pleasure, and a—consolation (!) all in one book! . . . I read it —at least the first volume—during one of the most (physically) wretched nights of my life; sitting up in bed, unable to get a wink of sleep for fever and sore throat, and it helped me through that dreary night as well—better than—the most sympathetic friend watching by my bedside could have done." Mrs. Carlyle had an ingenious theory as to the personality of the author. "I have conceived of him in my mind [as] a man of middle age, with a wife from whom he has got those beautiful *feminine* touches in his book—a good many children, and a dog that he has as much fondness for as I have for my little Nero! For the rest—not just a clergyman, but brother or first cousin to a clergyman!" And

she adds, "How ridiculous all this *may* read beside the reality." It may be of interest to record that Thackeray spoke highly of the *Scenes* (to John Blackwood) and said *they were not written by a woman.* Mrs. Blackwood was "*sure* they were not written by a woman." Mrs. Oliphant, too, was confident as to their masculine authorship. On the other hand, "Mrs. Owen Jones and her husband have both detected the woman."

On December tenth, the Journal mentions a visit from Major Blackwood—"an unaffected, agreeable man. It was evident to us, when he had only been in the room a few minutes, that he knew I was George Eliot." It was, then, we may presume an open secret, at least so far as her publishers were concerned, that was revealed to John Blackwood when he called on the author on February 28, 1858. "He talked a good deal about the 'Clerical Scenes' and George Eliot, and at last asked, 'Well, am I to see George Eliot this time?' G. said, 'Do you wish to see him?' 'As he likes—I wish it to be quite spontaneous.' I left the room, and G. following me a moment, I told him he might reveal me. Blackwood was kind, came back when he found he was too late for the train, and said he would come to Richmond again." Thus was the dread secret revealed to the Blackwoods. That it was proclaimed later on *urbi et orbi,* was due to a Mr. Liggins, who has no other title to fame. The cir-

cumstances in which this divulgation was made will be narrated in their place. They are interesting as exemplifying one, at least, of the dangers of anonymity.

The *Scenes* were subscribed to the number of five hundred and eighty, "with a probable addition of 25 for Longmans." "Mudie has taken 350. When we used to talk of the probable subscription, G. always said 'I dare say it will be 250!' " The final number subscribed for was, it seems, six hundred and fifty. This was on January eighth.

A book may be much talked about among the elect, and it may receive high praise from the reviewers; but it does not necessarily sell. In forwarding the letter from Faraday, quoted above, Blackwood mentions that "Simpkin & Marshall have sent for twelve additional copies—the first sign of a move since the subscription." They look into the life of Charlotte Brontë to see how long it was before *Jane Eyre* came into demand at the libraries and find it was not until six weeks after publication. On February fourth George Eliot received the discouraging news that "though the book is much talked of, it moves very slowly." Her solicitude concerning such mundane matters as sales and circulation was destined soon to be dissipated, once and for all. Her next work was fated within a few weeks of its publication, to achieve a circulation which, though a

popular writer of these days would have thought it contemptible enough, sufficed to impress the wolf with the uselessness of making any further attempt to force an entry at the Lewes' door. The growling of that insatiable beast, which had, at times, sounded menacingly near, was soon to become audible no more.

CHAPTER XI

GEORGE ELIOT was, like all sensitive and delicate natures, liable to terrible alternations of hope and despondency. Those who picture her as she was late in life, the famous *salonière* receiving the homage of her guests in her drawing-room at the Priory, have little idea of the fires that had leaped and died down and blazed forth again in that breast which to them seemed so calm, so serene. As she sat there always in the same low armchair on the left-hand side of the fire, she presented an almost majestic appearance. The massive head, the abundant hair streaked with gray, draped with lace arranged mantilla fashion and coming to a point at the top of the forehead, the gravity of her demeanor, the prestige of her literary renown, all this was well calculated to fill the visitor with awe not unmingled with trepidation for one who surely must always have been a stranger to the passions and still more to the weaknesses by which ordinary human breasts are visited. Yet George Eliot was as wilful and as wayward, as passionate, as human and above all as feminine as her own Maggie. We are apt to forget the wild gypsy-like little

wench of Dorlcote Mill when we contemplate the majestic *salonière* of the Priory seated on her intellectual throne with a throng of admiring courtiers speaking with subdued voices as though in the presence-chamber of a queen. Still she had drunk and drunk deep of the cup of passion; she had flung off the winter garment of repentance, she had cried like the truant nun:

> I am sister to the mountains, now,
> And sister to the Sun and Moon.

This august woman, who lives in the popular imagination so calm and so passionless, was in reality the most feminine of her sex. All that sex's waywardness, all its impulsiveness, all its abandon and all its weakness, all its sense of dependence had found a place in her bosom. If charm, the disarming charm that wins universal allegiance, was not always and everywhere manifest, it was there for those who possessed the secret of touching into music the hidden chords of her nature. Being shy and diffident and acutely mistrustful of her own powers, she seemed often enough reserved and even cold to the world at large, but to those she loved and by whom she was beloved, and especially to one—to George Henry Lewes—no one could give a tenderer or more uncalculating devotion.

The *Scenes of Clerical Life* then, though they brought in no magnificent return in money, lent her stability, stilled the misgivings of her native diffidence and set free another element in her moral constitution, the determination, the tenacity of purpose which we may suppose she inherited from her father. This quality, though less showy and certainly less congruous with the biliary sanguine temperament of the artist than her sensitiveness and susceptibility to praise or blame, did her invaluable service at this crisis of her career. We have called it tenacity of purpose; we might have called it ambition. She set herself to attain a lofty goal. The initial success she had achieved, even if it were no more than a *succès d'estime,* had shown her that she possessed powers of mind and powers of expression above the ordinary. Her ambition now summoned her to make the most of them. She would begin again, and on a wider field.

George Eliot finished *Janet's Repentance* on October 9, 1857. She gave herself a fortnight's respite from writing and then on October twenty-second she began *Adam Bede.* Before that date she went with Lewes on a tour in Germany, and it was while that tour was in progress that she wrote the second part of it; the third she finished on her return to England. It took her just over a year to write, and it was published early in 1858.

At a bound, so to speak, she found herself, as Sir Leslie Stephen puts it, "in the first rank of Victorian novelists;" and they were no inglorious company. It was no mean achievement to secure a place in the roll of fame beside such names as Dickens and Thackeray and the Brontës, to say nothing of Bulwer Lytton, Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Anthony Trollope and Charles Reade. Some of these stars have dimmed in the sequel. Thackeray, one imagines, is not read a great deal in these days, and still less Charles Kingsley, Bulwer Lytton and Charles Reade. Modern critics have even had the temerity to lay defiling hands on Dickens, whose reputation we had long come to regard as sacrosanct. True, Anthony Trollope has undergone a sort of resuscitation, and an attempt to restore his circulation has met with an undeniable if transient success. But on the whole, the glory within whose radiant and comfortable beams these giants of fiction once basked has noticeably diminished in effulgence. And George Eliot is no exception to the rule. To put it quite plainly hers is no longer, as the common saying has it, a name to conjure with.

How far is this eclipse to be accounted for? One of the reasons, and the principal one as I think, of her diminished popularity may be sought in the statement of Sir Leslie Stephen who records, as though it were a

feather in her cap, that "George Eliot alone came to fiction from philosophy. She was," he continues, ". . . familiar with the speculations of her day, and had accepted the most advanced rationalist opinions." That is it: *She alone came to fiction from philosophy.* Now philosophical novels, novels dealing with the speculations of their day, if they flourish in their day, usually die with it. A crowded hour of glorious life—and then oblivion, of a completeness proportionate to the meteor-like brilliance of their apparition upon the literary firmament. They may continue to be read for a time on account of the excellence of their workmanship or for some other reason, but they carry within them the elements of an invincible caducity and once dead, nothing will restore them to life. *Robert Elsmere,* which formed the topic of conversation in innumerable drawing-rooms and provided the text for sermons in every church throughout the land, has gone beyond recall. But *Adam Bede* is not one of these "*ad hoc*" productions. Philosophy indeed it contains, so much, alas! must be admitted, but its main purpose is not philosophical, its aim is not to expound any theory of religion or irreligion. It was written with no special didactic purpose in view. It was written because its author had a passionate love of Beauty within her and a no less passionate desire to give it expression. The vision was there, within her; the un-

heard melody was in her heart. These things would out and nothing—assuredly not John Blackwood's strictures on *Janet's Repentance*—availed to stop them. George Eliot's genius had lain like the tranquil mass of gathered waters imprisoned by a dam. Lewes had loosened a stone of this seemingly impenetrable barrier of intellectualism and philosophy and the genius had come trickling through, and the trickle soon became a flood whose progress nothing could stem. It is not merely because they are things of beauty that George Eliot's best novels—*Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*—deserve to live and ought at all costs to be rescued from oblivion; but because that beauty is a type that is unique in English literature, because no one has depicted in such mellow and lasting colors that England undefiled and unspoiled which was the England of her childhood.

It is often said—professors, schoolmasters, learned people generally, have it so—that properly to appreciate the qualities of a writer, it is essential that we should acquaint ourselves with the conditions in which he lived, that we should know not only the circumstances of the writer's own life, his personal history, that is to say, but the social, political and religious conditions prevailing at the particular stage of the world's development at which he flourished. You can not, they will say, for example, read Virgil with understanding unless you are

steeped in a knowledge of the times in which he lived. His work, his ideas, were a product of the moral, social and political conditions of his day, and a knowledge of these is indispensable, if you would pretend to a proper knowledge of the poet and his works. No doubt all this is true enough, up to a point. And yet I can not help thinking that the greatness of an imaginative writer is to be measured by his independence of the trammels of time and place, else how should they make their way among mankind, how should they exert their influence not on a single race and a single generation only, but on all nations and in every age?

It needs no great knowledge of Elizabethan literature to enable us to see the power and the beauty that dwell in such a line as,

After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.

Nor need we have any specially profound acquaintance with Roman history to be moved by the music of such a line as

Flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen.

Nor again does it always follow that the people who possess all this apparatus of erudition, historical, political, social, philosophical, philological, archeological

and so forth, are gifted with an ear to record and a soul to enjoy that music. It is because the best work of George Eliot is endowed with a large, a preponderating measure of this eternal quality that, at any rate so long as English continues to be read, we need fear for it no final and irrevocable eclipse.

A Victorian critic, whose works would probably be read more widely now had he not been a religious teacher as well as a critic, thus describes the work of the imagination in literature and the mode in which it operates.

"The imagination," he says, "must be at work in any writing which deserves the name of literature . . . its main power is the power of creation—the power by which man draws nearest to the power of God—the making of a new thing in the world for the pleasure and praise of all the spirits of the universe. It is not the making of a new thing out of nothing, as 'creation' used to be defined; but it is the making out of existing elements, by recombining them afresh, of a complete and rounded thing which did not exist before. This is what imagination does in literature, sitting alone like Prometheus, by the sea of human life and in her hands turning old material into shapes as yet unknown. And she does this moved by the passions; her blood, as she works, thrilling with sorrow or indignation, with love,

joy or pity, with awe or hope, according to her material. . . . What it paints or builds, or carves, or sings, or writes, is true; goes down to the bottom rock of all its varied material in her natural world, and to the mother elements of the heart of man.

"Then, out of the whole of this work of the imagination, out of the constant love which the writer has felt for the ideas he has to shape, and for the mould into which he has thrown them; out of the joy with which he has been thrilled while he wrote them into a creation—emerges beauty, the outward form of love and joy. The thing is made and beautifully made.

"The last result is life. Life beats in the book, the poem, the drama, like a tide; its force is always young, and passes from it like a spirit into men, pleasing and kindling them, bearing witness to truth and beauty. Age after age, like a living voice, it loves to inspire and exalt, to console and bless. The thing repels decay; it is as fresh this year as it was when first it spoke to man, it may be centuries ago."

That is an eloquent passage, perhaps too eloquent for this generation. Beauty is a word not much in vogue at the present time. The word and its concrete manifestations are fast vanishing from men's minds and from off the face of the earth. Nevertheless that passage contains the criteria by which literature in the long run

must be judged, by which it stands or falls. How then does the work of George Eliot survive the test, what is the verdict of posterity? It is surely that it contains all these necessary elements, but alloyed and obscured with much baser material.

Nevertheless, when all deductions are made, when all that her detractors can say about her has been said, it must surely be allowed that her work exhibits qualities of greatness both of thought and execution, which entitle her to a place in the front rank not only among Victorian novelists but among the writers of fiction of whatever age and whatever nationality.

Adam Bede, which many regard as her greatest work, doubtless exhibits glaring defect both of execution and design; but it contains elements of greatness for which we may look in vain not only among the novelists of her own day but among those who preceded and those who followed her. If she did not always rise to the height of her own great argument, she often did, and that argument was higher than that which the majority of fiction writers propose to themselves. The two works which followed the *Scenes of Clerical Life,* namely *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* are great commentaries on human life. They are of a nature and a scope which prompt comparison not so much with the work of any novelist as with such a creative genius as Shakespeare.

Such a comparison was in fact made in her own day. In ours it need not be rejected.

Adam Bede is the story of the love entertained by a young village carpenter (Adam Bede) for the niece of the principal farmer in the parish (Martin Poyser). The niece (Hetty Sorrel) is seduced by the nephew and heir (Arthur Donnithorne) of the neighboring Squire, by whom she has a child. This child she killed in an access of frenzy and despair, a crime for which she suffers transportation. She is led to confess her crime by a beautiful young Methodist woman (Dinah Morris), the niece of the farmer's wife who visits her in prison and who had been introduced to us early in the story as preaching on the Village Green. A year or so after the exit of the unhappy child-murderess the young carpenter marries the beautiful Methodist, who bears him children and with whom he lives the remainder of his days in calm and happiness.

The incident of the seduction and the child-murder was suggested to George Eliot by a story recounted to her one afternoon at Griff by her Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of her father's younger brother) as long ago as 1840 or thereabouts. The incident in question was historical. The Methodist aunt had herself played the part assigned to Dinah Morris in the story. She had visited the unfortunate girl in prison, prevailed on her

to confess her crime and gone with her in the cart to the place of execution. "The story," says George Eliot in her Journal, "affected me deeply, and I never lost the impression of that afternoon and our talk together; but I believe I never mentioned it, through all the intervening years, till something prompted me to tell it to George in December, 1856, when I had begun to write the 'Scenes of Clerical Life.' " The value of the incident as an element in a story could hardly have escaped a much less wide-awake person than Lewes. At any rate it did not escape him; he immediately recognized in it a potential source of renown and—who shall blame him?—pecuniary reward. George Eliot at first thought of making this incident, together with some further reminiscences of her aunt and her father into one of the series of *Scenes*. Fortunately she abandoned that idea. She determined instead to make the story the subject of a full length novel. That novel she began to write on October 22, 1857.

Let it be stated at the outset that the plot is a dislocated one, that dislocation is perhaps mainly due to influences from without, to kind friends, notably to George Lewes who made suggestions during the progress of the book's composition as to the form it ought to take. George Eliot had no doubt a considerable respect for Lewes' literary opinions as such, but this would not

have been enough to make her defer to them against her will or better judgment. There was, however, a stronger influence at work. She was still in love with "George" and he could say or do no wrong. Lewes prompted her to write the story, wherein he did well. He also prompted her to mar it, and that was not so good.

Like most sinners, as they used to be called—like most very *human* folk as we term them now—Lewes entertained a high admiration for the saints. While the rest of the world, being "indifferent honest," fell in love with the erring Hetty (who at all events was made of their own flesh and blood), Lewes lost his heart to Dinah who combined a spirit of exalted virtue with great but calm, almost austere beauty of face and figure. She would make, said Lewes, an admirable wife for Adam. That was true, and being true it never ought to have been allowed to happen in a novel purporting to portray real life. But on Lewes' urgent representation, it was made to happen. Dinah must, he said, be the heroine of the story, and as the story begins with her, so with her, it must end.

There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of saints: the conscious and the unconscious. There are the saints who "go into the business," if one may be pardoned so rough and ready an expression, who say "I will be a saint" just as another might say "I will be a doctor," or

a nurse, or an engineer, or a schoolmistress. They display the insignia and adopt the language traditionally associated with sanctity. Their virtues are visible at a glance. They are aware of them, and so are you. You recognize them at once as one of the elect. Then there is another class of saint, the class that have no idea at all that they are saints and who would be the last people in the world to be convinced of it. They act and talk just like ordinary people among whom they dwell quite unsuspected. They are often naïve sort of folk who are frequently put upon and who assent cheerfully to their own exploitation. And then they depart, and behold, there is an unearthly music and a scent of lilies in the air, and those who are left, who had rubbed shoulders and talked familiarly, day by day, with him, this quite ordinary person who has gone, look at one another in awe and wonder, as people who have entertained an angel unawares.

But about the holiness of Dinah Morris there was nothing of this hidden character. The sign of her election was unmistakably legible upon her. Far be it from me to find fault or to criticize one whose conduct was so uniformly and unerringly just. I look on her with envy and admiration—with envy and admiration, but not, alas, with love. Not only is her behavior, as it is exhibited to us, free from all suspicion of blemish,

but it is never so much as hinted that she could possibly err, that even so much as an interjection of petulance or impatience could escape her. All that she says and all that she does is good and beautiful. There are utterances put into the mouth of Dinah Morris that must have brought tears to the eyes of George Eliot as she wrote them, even as they bring tears to our eyes as we read them. If only she could have been made to live! She, like Adam, the hero of the story, is a collection of attributes, of qualities in search of a human body which alas, they do not find. They never become incarnate. They are like those disembodied spirits, with the shadowy forms of men and women,who crowd into Charon's boat without depressing it in the slightest degree nearer the Stygian flood. Lewes, though he thought highly of Dinah, felt that there was something wanting in Adam, said he was becoming too passive, but even the fight in the woods, in which he fells Arthur Donnithorne with a blow and knocks him senseless, fails to convince us that he is really flesh and blood. The one genuinely human thing about him is that he loves Hetty whose appeal is certainly not moral or spiritual. When, however, after the tragedy of the trial is over and Hetty is sent away to expiate her crime beyond the seas, Adam and Dinah, forgetting all the agony of those terrible scenes, are able to settle down in comfortable wedlock, we feel

that they are well-matched indeed, but we are conscious somehow of a difficulty, of a dilemma. If Adam's love for Hetty had been as great as the author would have us believe, Adam does not gain in our estimation by the readiness with which he consoles himself with Dinah; if Dinah was the saint portrayed for us in the earlier chapters of the book, she also disappoints us by deserting her vocation for the comforts and security of a home. And when in the epilogue we are introduced to two sturdy infants, the fruits of the union of these two abstractions, we are of course pleased, for such an addition was needed to round off the picture, to complete the idyll, but we are vaguely puzzled. In short we admire the qualities exhibited by the exemplary Adam and the saintly Dinah, but our heart is still with Hetty, caught like a poor bewildered bird in the tempest of fate and whirled we know not whither. And when Dinah goes forth, through the mellow evening light with her children, goes forth from the house with the buff walls and the soft gray thatch, to greet her husband, we wonder by what shore, friendless and remote, is Hetty's spirit wandering now. We can not drive her from our minds, and like the cry of her own child, Hetty's voice, helpless and beseeching, rings eternally in our ears.

The sadness that exists in fact must be redressed in

fiction. The great reading public does not like to be sad for long, nor, to do it justice, does it like to contemplate sadness in others. The writer of fiction, if he wishes to be popular, must perform the office of a heaven and redress, in the epilogue, the things he set awry at the outset. Messrs. Mudie's subscribers insist on a happy ending, or their sleep might be disturbed. What is a novel for, save to keep us amused for an hour or two and then send us to bed quite happy in our minds? Hetty? Oh, well, Hetty sinned, and was punished, and died in a distant land. And Arthur Donnithorne, her seducer, he could never know happiness, and he did not deserve to be happy. Vice must be punished and virtue must be shown triumphant. That is the cardinal duty of every good British novelist. And Lewes who, as Sir Leslie Stephen remarks, had an eye for business, believed in giving the public what the public wants.

In matter of fact, Aunt Samuel the Methodist, who told the story out of which *Adam Bede* was evolved, was anything but an abstraction. On the contrary she was singularly—and sometimes uncomfortably—alive. She was a little dark-eyed woman, very energetic and bustling, full of proselytizing fervor and "remonstrated in season and out of season." She was possessed of a genuine kindness, a genuine desire to do good, but she liked these things to be recognized, and we can hear

the tone of pride and satisfaction in her voice as at the end of her story she described to her niece "the great respect with which this ministry of hers was regarded by the official people about the gaol."

As for Adam, he was her father, Robert Evans, with all, or nearly all, the humanity knocked out of him. He is impressive, sometimes oppressive, but he does not exist, or at least only intermittently. He is a very Bowdlerized version of that pleasant homely fellow between whose knees the little wench used to drive about the Warwickshire lanes, or at whose feet she would sit beside the fire in that great comfortable kitchen at Griff, nursing her wooden doll or reading, with her hair all tumbling about her face, *Æsop's Fables* or Defoe's *History of the Devil,* which her father, knowing and caring little about books, had "picked up" at some sale or other because they were going for a song and had good-looking bindings. Robert Evans was a fine figure of a man, a hard and conscientious worker, and with plenty of brains for his job, but kind-hearted and companionable and by no means disdainful of the cheerful glass.

If then, the reader may ask, the protagonists of this drama are thus shadowy and unreal, if the reader's sympathies are thus forced by the author out of their natural channel, if he regards with coldness if not with disapproval the characters upon whom the author desires him

to pour his affection, these defects of structure and characterization are surely vital. On what foundations then do the high claims made for this book repose? "Shakespearean" was one of the epithets employed to describe this writer's genius. Shakespeare did not create shadows or automata. How then is this claim to be made good? We shall endeavor to show.

CHAPTER XII

It is now some eighteen years since George Eliot said farewell to Griff. That old house which lay like a jewel upon the green robe of that placid Warwickshire country was beautiful in itself. Time, the long succession of years, the winds and the rains, the warm rays of the sun, the soft beams of the moon, had laid their spell upon it. Old, yet perennially beautiful, the memory of it dwelt, with yet an added loveliness, in the heart of the woman who had once, as a little child, wandered at will among its pleasant places. A wide gulf of years and events had flowed between her and those far-off days; new voices, new friends, new interests—but she did not, could not, forget those distant days, days of her childhood, which, though they had had their trials and tribulations, seemed to her, as now in the midway of her life she turned a backward gaze upon them, so full of grace and charm. It was a vision she must paint, and paint it she did in colors whose richness Time can not take away. When England is completely urbanized or at least suburbanized, which, if things go on as they are going at present, will not be very long delayed, it

will be pleasant to look, as one might look upon the canvas of a Constable, or a Marlow, or a Crome, upon such a picture as this:

"The Green lay at the extremity of the village, and from it the road branched off in two directions, one leading farther up the hill by the church, and the other winding gently down towards the valley. On the side of the Green that led towards the church, the broken line of thatched cottages was continued nearly to the churchyard gate; but on the opposite, northwestern side, there was nothing to obstruct the view of the gently swelling meadow, and wooded valley, and dark masses of distant hill. That rich undulating district of Loamshire to which Hayslope belonged, lies close to a grim outskirt of Stonyshire, overlooked by its barren hills as a pretty blooming sister may sometimes be seen linked in the arm of a rugged, tall, swarthy brother; and in two or three hours' ride the traveller might exchange a bleak treeless region, intersected by lines of cold grey stone, for one where his road wound under the shelter of woods, or up swelling hills, muffled with hedgerows and long meadow-grass and thick corn; and where at every turn he came upon some fine old country-seat nestled in the valley or crowning the slope, some homestead with its long length of barn and its cluster of golden ricks, some grey steeple looking out from a

pretty confusion of trees and thatch and dark-red tiles. It was just such a picture as this last that Hayslope Church had made to the traveller as he began to mount the gentle slope leading to its pleasant uplands, and now from his station near the Green he had before him in one view nearly all the other typical features of this pleasant land. High up against the horizon were the huge conical masses of hill, like giant mounds intended to fortify this region of corn and grass against the keen and hungry winds of the north; not distant enough to be clothed in purple mystery, but with sombre, greenish sides visibly specked with sheep, whose motion was only revealed by memory, not detected by sight; wooed from day to day by the changing hours, but responding with no change in themselves—left for ever grim and sullen after the flush of morning, the winged gleams of April noonday, the parting crimson glory of the ripening summer sun. And directly below them the eye rested on a more advanced line of hanging woods, divided by bright patches of pasture or furrowed crops, and not yet deepened into the uniform leafy curtains of high summer, but still showing the warm tints of the young oak and the tender green of the ash and lime. Then came the valley, where the woods grew thicker, as if they had rolled down and hurried together from the patches left smooth on the slope, that they might take

the better care of the tall mansion which lifted its parapets and sent its faint blue summer smoke among them. Doubtless there was a large sweep of park and a broad glassy pool in front of that mansion, but the swelling slope of the meadow would not let our traveller see them from the village green. He saw instead a foreground which was just as lovely—the level sunlight lying like transparent gold among the gently curving stems of the feathered grass and the tall red sorrel, and the white umbels of the hemlocks lining the bushy hedgerows. It was that moment in summer when the sound of the scythe being whetted makes us cast more lingering looks at the flower-sprinkled tresses of the meadows."

Such is the setting of the scene amid which the story is to be enacted. It is a broad preliminary sketch, and always as the story proceeds, she is putting in with unerring insight and skill a touch here and a touch there.

And this is a picture of Dinah Morris as she goes out to address the meeting on the Village Green:

"Dinah walked as simply as if she were going to market, and seemed as unconscious of her outward appearance as a little boy: there was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, 'I know you think me a pretty woman, too young to preach'; no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips, no attitude of

the arms that said, 'But you must think of me as a saint.' She held no book in her ungloved hands, but let them hang down lightly crossed before her, as she stood and turned her grey eyes on the people. There was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations; they had the liquid look which tells that the mind is full of what it has to give out, rather than impressed by external objects. She stood with her left hand towards the descending sun, and leafy boughs screened her from its rays; *but in this sober light the delicate colouring of her face seemed to gather a calm vividness, like flowers at evening.*"

With that magical touch George Eliot invests the form and features of Dinah Morris with an imperishable halo. Time halts, the sun stands still and the light that lingers on the pale and beautiful face of Dinah will never fade. "*Like flowers at evening.*" It is a touch of genius. Whatever occasional blemishes her work may exhibit, by whatever irrelevant intrusions of philosophy and pedantry it may from time to time be marred, there is no doubting after that, but that we are in the presence of a soul of rare distinction. "*Like flowers at evening.*" The haunting beauty of that simile will never leave you; it is unforgettable.

In marked contrast with Dinah Morris and her Evangelical fervor is the rector, Parson Irwine. If in the

whole range of English fiction there is a more attractive cleric than the Reverend Adolphus Irwine, Rector of Broxton, Vicar of Hayslope and Vicar of Blythe, I have yet to make his acquaintance. A special chapter is devoted by George Eliot to introduce him and his picturesque and aristocratic old mother. The description of them and of the dining-room at Broxton Parsonage where they are seated together playing chess one rainy morning is one of the triumphs of the book. The scene is painted with all the delicacy, the precision, the rich yet sober coloring of a Dutch master. It is so vivid, yet so subdued, so carefully observed yet so natural and unforced, that it seems to recall to us a scene beheld long since, rather than to introduce to us a new one.

"Before twelve o'clock [thus the chapter opens] there had been some heavy storms of rain, and the water lay in deep gutters on the sides of the gravel-walks in the garden of Broxton Parsonage; the great Provence roses had been cruelly tossed by the wind and beaten by the rain, and all the delicate-stemmed border flowers had been dashed down and stained with the wet soil."

Many times have I walked up that garden path and felt the shining gravel "crunch" beneath my feet and drunk in the scent of the thyme and marjoram and of the moist teeming earth, and gazed on the storm-dashed flowers, with the great rain-drops glistening on their

petals; many a time have I walked up that gravel path and looked again into that dining-room where the Parson is playing chess with his mother as he was playing many years ago.

"The room is a large and lofty one, with an ample mullioned oriel window at one end; the walls, you see, are new and not yet painted, but the furniture, though originally of an expensive sort, is old and scanty, and there is no drapery about the window. The crimson cloth over the large dining-table is very threadbare, though it contrasts pleasantly enough with the dead hue of the plaster on the walls; but on this cloth there is a massive silver waiter with a decanter of water on it, of the same pattern as two larger ones that are propped up on the sideboard with a coat of arms conspicuous in their centre. You suspect at once that the inhabitants of this room have inherited more blood than wealth, and would not be surprised to find that Mr. Irwine had a finely-cut nostril and upper lip; but at present we can only see that he has a broad flat back and an abundance of powdered hair, all thrown backward and tied behind with a black ribbon—a bit of conservatism in costume which tells you that he is not a young man. . . ."

The game proceeds and ends—in Mrs. Irwine's favor. Some conversation ensues and the servant comes to the door to announce that Joshua Rann, shoemaker

and parish clerk, wishes to speak with the rector, if he's at liberty. Mr. Rann in due course appears at the door and Mr. Irwine turns round his chair to greet him:

"It is very pleasant to see some men turn round: pleasant as a sudden rush of warm air in winter, or the flash of firelight in the chill dusk. . . ."

So much for his appearance. As for his doctrine, his theological qualifications, it must be remembered that this story took place in the pre-Tractarian days. Mr. Roe, the "travelling preacher" of Treddleston had proclaimed Mr. Irwine to be an "idle shepherd," and the author confesses that "he really had no very lofty aims, no theological enthusiasm: if [she continues] I were closely questioned, I should be obliged to confess that he felt no serious alarms about the souls of his parishioners, and would have thought it a mere loss of time to talk in a doctrinal and awakening manner to old 'Feyther' Taft, or even to Chad Cranage the blacksmith. If he had been in the habit of speaking theoretically, he would have perhaps said that the only healthy form religion could take in such minds was that of certain dim but strong emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties. He thought the custom of baptism more important than its doctrine, and that the religious benefits the peasant drew from the church where his fathers

worshipped and the sacred piece of turf where they lay buried, were but slightly dependent on a clear understanding of the Liturgy or the sermon. Clearly the Rector was not what is called in these days an 'earnest' man: he was fonder of church history than of divinity, and had much more insight into men's characters than interest in their opinions; he was neither laborious, nor obviously self-denying, nor very copious in almsgiving, and his theology, you perceive, was lax. His mental palate, indeed, was rather pagan, and found a savouriness in a quotation from Sophocles or Theocritus that was quite absent from any text in Isaiah or Amos. . . . On the other hand, I must plead, for I have an affectionate partiality towards the Rector's memory, that he was not vindictive—and some philanthropists have been so; that he was not intolerant—and there is a rumour that some zealous theologians have not been altogether free from that blemish; that although he would probably have declined to give his body to be burned in any public cause, and was far from bestowing all his goods to feed the poor, he had that charity which has sometimes been lacking to very illustrious virtue—he was tender to other men's failings, and unwilling to impute evil. He was one of those men, and they are not the commonest, of whom we can know the best only by following them away from the market-place, the platform, and the

pulpit, entering with them into their own homes, hearing the voice with which they speak to the young and aged about their own hearthstone, and witnessing their thoughtful care for the everyday wants of everyday companions, who take all their kindness as a matter of course, and not as a subject for panegyric."

Joshua Rann who had come to announce the stupendous tidings of Dinah's preaching on the Green, and to bring word that Thias Bede (Adam's father) had been drowned in the brook outside his own cottage the previous night, had had his say and taken his departure. Arthur Donnithorne (the Squire's nephew) had ridden over to pay a friendly call at the rectory and now the Parson and the young Squire, as he was called, were riding over to Hayslope where they will visit the Hall Farm, the home of the Poysers, and where Arthur will set eyes on Hetty Sorrel, a meeting from which such tragic consequences were destined to result.

"If you had met him [Mr. Irwine] that June afternoon riding on his grey cob, with his dogs running beside him—portly, upright, manly, with a good-natured smile on his finely-turned lips as he talked to his dashing young companion on the bay mare, you must have felt that, however ill he harmonised with sound theories of the clerical office, he somehow harmonised extremely well with that peaceful landscape.

"See them in the bright sunlight, interrupted every now and then by rolling masses of cloud, ascending the slope from the Broxton side, where the tall gables and elms of the rectory predominate over the tiny white-washed church. They will soon be in the parish at Hayslope; the grey churchtower and village roofs lie before them to the left, and farther on, to the right, they can just see the chimneys of the Hall Farm."

But times have changed since Parson Irwine's day and "progress" has laid a rude and disfiguring hand on such villages as Hayslope and Broxton, and the rector in these swifter noisier days would no longer fit in very well with the landscape, nor would he understand or be understood so well by the present generation. Joshua Rann and Chad Cranage and Bartle Massey have long since been laid under the green turf. They have gone and left no successors behind them.

. . . extrema per illos
Justitia, excedous terris, vestigia fecit.

The Hall has long since passed out of the hands of the Donnithorne family and strangers possess the lands. No traveler riding leisurely on his way would pause now to look on the landscape bathed in the light of the setting sun or find much to interest him in a knot of people

gathered together to listen to a "preaching" on the Village Green. The twin tyrants of Speed and Noise have cast their dominion over the land and no place is so remote but that the signs of this sovereignty are patent there. It were foolish to repine at the change, since change is the essence of life and not to change is to die. A new order of beauty may arise to take the place of that which has passed, but the old order has gone and can not be restored. The Parson Irwines, the Jack Russells are no more and the world they knew and loved has passed also. Neither they nor it will return; it is well therefore that they have been caught and stereotyped for succeeding generations in these immortal pages of a great and tender-hearted writer.

In these days when the world is growing ever and ever more highly mechanized, man is increasingly tending to lose his individuality. Everything, men and women, exhibit unmistakable and growing signs of being turned out according to pattern. The increasing complexity of life demands increased specialization; the dominance of machinery brings with it as its inevitable corollary, a tendency toward universal standardization. Local habits and customs, local variations of speech are doomed to disappear. Peculiarities of dialect, all those words and phrases which seem to smack of the very soil from which they sprang and reflect the hues of their

native skies, all these are being rapidly removed and obliterated by the spread of elementary education and by influences such as wireless, so that the day is not far distant when it will be impossible for us to judge from the speech of the inhabitants whether we be in Yorkshire or in Devon, and these local treasures of speech will die out or survive, if they survive at all, like faded and withered flowers in the "Transactions" of the various county associations.

The elegant Bulwer Lytton thought *Adam Bede* to be a book "worthy of great admiration," but he also thought that its defects were the use of dialect and Adam's marriage. To which George Eliot is said to have replied, "I would rather have my teeth drawn, than give up either." Whatever we may think about the marriage, there can be no question about the dialect. Mrs. Poyser, without those racy turns of speech, which, as by magic, bring the whole Warwickshire countryside before us, would hardly be Mrs. Poyser at all. It would be like porridge from which the salt had been omitted, like champagne with all the sparkle gone out of it.

When Charles Reade declared that *Adam Bede* was "the finest thing since Shakespeare," he was thinking of Mrs. Poyser, for Mrs. Poyser is in the true Shakespearean tradition. I do not know where in England or elsewhere, you will find a woman writer with a gift of

humor so rich and so profound and so unerring as George Eliot's. It is like a spring welling up clear and sparkling from the depth of the soil and reflecting in its waters the changing beauty of her native skies. It is unnecessary here to give examples of Mrs. Poyser's powers of repartee, of her comments on men and women and life in general. Her sallies have become proverbial and have passed into the language. Moreover, to divorce them from their context, to remove them from their atmosphere, would be inevitably to rob them of something of the color and the glow by which they are illumined. "Mrs. Poyser," as Sir Leslie Stephen truly observes, "became . . . one of the immortals." Nor is it too much to say, as the same critic claims, that "Mrs. Poyser may take rank with Sam Weller as one of the irresistible humorists."

All this is true; but it is none the less true that we know that Mrs. Poyser and, for the matter of that, Sam Weller, never had any real existence. Their characteristics are true to life, no doubt, but those characteristics are too greatly magnified to permit us, in our hearts and on reflection, to entertain the illusion of reality. Everything that Mrs. Poyser says is true to type—that is undeniable, but, from the point of view of the strictest realism, Mrs. Poyser exhibits one defect: she delivers herself of too many Poyserisms. "I have no stock of

proverbs in my memory," said George Eliot, when questioned as to the originality of Mrs. Poyser's gems of wit and wisdom, "and there is not one thing put into Mrs. Poyser's mouth that is not fresh from my own mint." "She had written the dialogue with obvious enjoyment, and appreciated its merits herself," says Sir Leslie Stephen approvingly. That is indeed true, too true, and we can see the artist enjoying her own skill and exulting in the repeated and always successful manifestation of her own virtuosity. In short, her characters, nearly all of them, tend in a greater or less degree, to become caricatures; triumphant and often beautiful, but still caricatures. Across the Channel another writer had been painting a picture of *mœurs de province,* narrating a story of life in a country village, and his aim, his theory of the necessities of his art, was to suppress himself, his own personality, entirely. Flaubert did not "put things into Madame Bovary's mouth." He did not stand apart from his dramatis personæ and make them speak, as a stage ventriloquist makes his figures speak. Flaubert *was* Madame Bovary; he lived her life and suffered what she suffered. He identified himself with her—and not with her alone, but with all his characters—with a completeness, an inwardness never achieved before or since. "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi!*" he exclaimed when some one asked him to reveal the prototype of his heroine.

And, equally, he might have said, "*Charles Bovary, c'est moi; M. Homais, c'est moi; Leon Dupuis, c'est moi; Veuve Lefrancois, c'est moi;*" and so on with all the rest of them, down to Felicité the servant girl, and Justin the apprentice. Madame Lefrancois, the widowed landlady of the Lion d'Or had a shrewd wit and a caustic tongue; but her pungency is sufficiently diluted to enable us to swallow it without gasping. Mrs. Poyser is (if one may be permitted the expression) offered to us neat, and though the vintage be sound it is rather too richly fortified.

But in what sense, and to what extent are we to consider George Eliot a realist? On the answer to that question hangs an important issue, for it were inequitable to condemn a writer for failure to attain an end at which he never aimed. "Scott's romanticism and Byron's sentimentalism," to quote Sir Leslie Stephen again, "represented obsolete phases of feeling, and suggested only burlesque or ridicule. The novelists were occupied in constructing a most elaborate panorama of the manners and customs of their own times with a minuteness and psychological analysis not known to their predecessors." And this he would appear to imply is the task to which George Eliot addressed herself.

In *Adam Bede,* however, it is important to observe, George Eliot is portraying not what she saw, but what

she remembered. She was calling to mind the things of her childhood, and both the scene and the actors are viewed by her through the heightening medium of imaginative memory and the imaginative memory inevitably lends a touch of the ideal to everything it contemplates. That is why her people in this book are both real and unreal. They are indeed real men and women and the scenes in which they live and act their parts are real, but the author, and we with her, behold them through the golden light which bathes with transfiguring radiance all things on which we gaze across a gulf of sundering years. There rests upon them a light which is not theirs, but is born of the emotions which the remembrance of them awakens in our hearts.

A consideration of George Eliot's religious beliefs—and disbeliefs—can not be based on one or two of her works; but must be brought out in view of her work as a whole, and not of her books alone, but of what we know and may reasonably infer from her life and conduct. The question therefore of her attitude to the unseen world, of her "reactions" to the philosophic, scientific and religious thought of her day, must be reserved until later. Meanwhile it may be mentioned that in the portrayal both of Dinah Morris and of Parson Irwine, and in many less obvious passages scattered *passim* throughout *Adam Bede,* there are indications that the

"complete rationalism" with which she has been popularly credited is liable to some very important modifications. The beliefs and convictions to which, with the utmost sincerity of which we are capable, we give concrete verbal expression, are not always—are indeed seldom—those which in the inmost sanctuary of our being we really hold or those which, in the important crises of our lives, we translate into action. It is not given to many to formulate their *apologia,* and knowledge of oneself is often the knowledge which is hidden most profoundly from our view.

The rural England which our fathers knew has almost disappeared; it lingers on here and there, in isolated patches, sad and forlorn, yet still beautiful, like those shreds of fields and hedgerows, those remnants of ancient farm or historic manor, that sometimes survive for a while in regions which the enterprising builder has proclaimed "ripe for development," amid the tide of bricks and mortar that sweeps suddenly and mercilessly around them soon to submerge them, too, beneath its relentless and all-devouring flood. And when at length that end is achieved nothing is left of all that former beauty, nothing save the memory of it that lives in the hearts and minds of those who loved it; so that when that generation shall have passed away, only a survey map or a few old prints and pictures, or some time-

stained plan of farmland or glebe will tell the local antiquary or historian that here was once a grove of larches, here an ancient grange, here a tree-shadowed pool whose still waters once mirrored the graceful form of the heron or the azure plumage of the kingfisher. Happy are those regions whose memory is enshrined not in such dry and prosaic records, but in pictures limned in colors that can not fade. Not to every one is it given to call up visions of field and pastureland, of wood and stream where now are league upon league of shops and villas. Few of those who make up the throng that surges about the Bank and the Mansion House are gifted with the imagination of Wordsworth's poor Susan for whom

> Bright visions of vapor through Lothbury glide
> And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

But in the pages of George Eliot, the sight and the scents and the sounds of that vanished Arcady which was her childhood's home, are preserved for us fragrant and undimmed. We hear the creak of the laden farm wagon, the swish of the scythe in the cool lush grass; the scent of the sweetbrier and the new mown hay is in our nostrils; the mellow sunlight lingers on the gables and creeper-clad walls of the Hall Farm; and if some of

the voices and some of the forms that peopled the scene grow faint and dim, others still speak to us in tones of undiminished power and humor and sweetness; and the scene itself has lost, and will lose, nothing of its grace and freshness. If we grow weary of the din of the world around us, of the multitudinous clamor that ceaselessly assails our ears, of the stream of miscellaneous information and comment—usually, and perhaps not unhappily, forgotten as soon as read—if we pine for something wherewith to recreate and refresh our jaded souls, we may do worse than wander for a while through those scenes of simple and tranquil beauty which once was England and which yet live on for us in the pages of *Adam Bede.* The England that George Eliot knew as a child has passed, passed never to return. It were foolish to lament or repine, for change, however little we may welcome it, is inevitable. Nevertheless, there are, I think, few instances of a nation surviving for long the extinction of its peasantry. The Mrs. Poyser of today no doubt listens in to the wireless and, forgetting her racy and original turns of speech, is learning to enunciate in the tone and manner of the young gentlemen who act as announcers to the British Broadcasting Corporation. She is, if not so wise, at all events more sophisticated, and is much less interested in her dairy than in making the last penny of profit out of her paying guests

from London or Manchester. Perhaps the qualities thus displaced have gone elsewhere, and the strength, the simplicity and the beauty have not been lost, but transferred to another sphere. The sons and daughters of successful tradesmen and industrialists are fine examples of athletic humanity, and cut a good figure on the tennis court or the golf course, and many of the regiments that fought with the greatest dash and courage in the war were born and bred in the courts and alleys of Stepney or Bethnal Green. But whence, since the day of squire and yeoman is over, and the country is denuded of its peasantry, is the race to be replenished? That is a question God and Dean Inge must answer.

Adam Bede's success was instantaneous and extraordinary, alike with the critics and the public, and George Eliot suddenly became a star of the first magnitude. Blackwood had offered her eight hundred pounds for four years' copyright, and she had gladly accepted the offer. But the sales surpassed the most sanguine expectations. Seven editions, making a total of sixteen thousand copies, were sold in the first year. Blackwood was generous—and far-seeing—enough to give her another check for eight hundred pounds, and gave back the copyright in view of the book's unlooked-for success. For four thousand copies of her next novel he offered two thousand pounds and expressed his willingness to

pay at the same rate for subsequent editions. Sir Leslie Stephen, therefore, can hardly be accused of exaggerating when he says that "the pecuniary success" of *Adam Bede* "put her at once and permanently beyond the reach of any pecuniary pressure."

This was the heyday of her inspiration. The flood of her genius was now at its height.

CHAPTER XIII

WHILE the first volume of *Adam Bede* was being written, the Leweses were living at Richmond; but early in 1858 they decided to make a tour in Germany, in search of material and local color for Lewes' *Life of Goethe.* On April seventh of that year they started for Munich. Nürnberg, where they stayed only twenty-four hours, George Eliot was loath to leave so soon. It is a little strange—though it shows very clearly how far she was from being narrow or bigoted—to find her saying in a letter to Miss Sara Hennell what a pity it was the "place became Protestant, so that there is only one Catholic church, where one can go in and out as one would. We turned," she goes on, "into the famous St. Sebald's for a minute, where a Protestant clergyman was reading in a cold, formal way under the grand Gothic arches. Then we went to the Catholic church, the Frauen-Kirche, where the organ and voices were giving forth a glorious mass; and we stood with a feeling of brotherhood among the standing congregation till the last note of the organ had died out."

Lewes appears to have been armed with first-rate in-

troductions, for they visit and are visited by most of the notabilities in the places where they sojourn. Herr Oldenbourg drops in and discourses about Kaulbach and his "Hunnen Schlacht" which the critics called a "Weltgeschichtliches Bild." Bodenstedt presents himself—"a charming man"—who tells them he is writing a work in five volumes on the "Contemporaries of Shakespeare." Liebig, the chemist, is "charming with well-cut features, a low quiet voice and gentle manners. It was touching to see his hands, the nails black from the roots, the skin all grimed." To Liebig, indeed, George Eliot took a particular fancy, and he to her. "We dined with him . . . yesterday," she notes in a letter to Sara Hennell, "and saw how men of European celebrity may put up with greasy cooking in private life . . . his manners are charming—easy, graceful, benignant, and all the more conspicuous because he is so quiet and low-spoken among the loud talkers here," and she draws a picture of him "in his laboratory, with his velvet cap on, holding little phials in his hand, and talking of Kreatine and Kreatinine in the same easy way that well-bred ladies talk scandal."

Max, King of Bavaria, patron of the arts and sciences, used to get up at five o'clock in the morning to study, and every Saturday evening had a gathering of the first men in science and literature that he might benefit by

their opinions on important subjects. Every one had to say honestly what he thought, and every one might contradict every one else. To be suspected of polite insincerity meant that the too polished man would be invited no more. Liebig was among those who were always present at the Round Table as an understood part of their functions. Others came only by invitation. Bodenstedt, the poet, was another of the favored ones who attended as a matter of course. He "is one of our best friends here," writes George Eliot, "—enormously instructed after the fashion of Germans, but not at all stupid with it."

But neither sight-seeing nor all these visits to and from celebrities in science, literature and the arts were allowed to interfere with the even tenor of their work. People were very kind to them, and they felt quite at home. We "sip *baierisch Bier* with great tolerance," she says, "and talk bad German with more and more *aplomb*." But work came first. "Our life here is very agreeable—full of pleasant novelty, although we take things quietly and observe our working hours just as if we were at Richmond." They had to dine at one, and they made it a rule, which they religiously observed, always to work till that hour. As, however, all the great exhibitions were closed, "except the churches" two hours later they had to take their art "in very small

draughts" which seems to have been no great hardship to George Eliot for whom modern German art had but few attractions. She found it, for the most part, "elaborate lifelessness." She was greatly impressed by a spectacle which showed her that happiness may co-exist with a mixed marriage. Her reference to the matter is significant as revealing her own large-heartedness and breadth of sympathy. "Among the awful mysterious names," she writes in a letter to Sara Hennell, "hitherto known only as marginal references whom we have learned to clothe with ordinary flesh and blood, is Professor Martius (Spix and Martius), now an old man, and rich after the manner of being rich in Germany. He has a very sweet wife—one of those women who remain pretty and graceful in old age—and a family of three daughters and one son, all more than grown up. I learned that she is Catholic, that her daughters are Catholic, and her husband and son Protestant—the children having been so brought up according to the German law in cases of mixed marriage. I can't tell you how interesting it was to me to hear her tell of her experience in bringing up her son conscientiously as a Protestant, and then to hear her and her daughters speak of the exemplary priests who had shown them such tender and fatherly care when they were in trouble. They are the most harmonious, affectionate family we have seen; and

one delights in such a triumph of human goodness over the formal logic of theorists."

Thus the time went on. To-day it is an afternoon call at Liebig's, who goes a long walk with them—the long chain of snowy mountains in the distance. Another day, "through the cold wind and the white dust to the Jesuits' church to hear the music, a fine church in the Renaissance style, the visits terminating with the great altar, very fine, with all the crowd of human beings covering the floor. Numbers of men!" And that same evening they go to Bodenstedt's whose wife, "a delicate creature," sang them some very charming Bavarian *Volkslieder.*

Another evening they spend at Professor Martius's where "Frau Erdl played Beethoven's Andante and the Moonlight Sonata admirably." But if the society at Munich was agreeable and the sight of the snowy mountains beautiful and impressive, the climate was eminently trying. "You go to dinner here in summer," she writes in a letter to Blackwood, "and come away from it in winter. You are languid among trees and feathery grass at one end of the town, and are shivering in a hurricane of dust at the other. This inconvenience of climate, with the impossibility of dining (well) at any other hour than one o'clock, is not friendly to the stomach—that great seat of the imagination.

And I shall never advise an author to come to Munich except *ad interim.*"

But all this time the work was progressing. If on an afternoon she was in the great Saal admiring Rubens' pictures or the sculptures, or walking beneath "the deliciously clear and blue sky, that made even the ugliest buildings beautiful by the light it cast on them," or listening to *William Tell* or pacing in sight of the snowy mountains with Liebig or Bodenstedt, her mornings were spent with *Adam Bede* and all his folk, her heart and soul were all in her beloved corner of Warwickshire to which her sojourn in a land so distant, amid scenes and people so different, lent an added touch of homeliness and charm. From time to time the progress of her work is noted in her Journal. For example, on the fifteenth of May she writes: "Read the 18th chapter of 'Adam Bede' to G. He was much pleased with it." After which they walk in the Englische Garten, and see the Germans "drinking their beer." Again, on the twenty-sixth of May, she records, "This evening I have read aloud 'Adam Bede' chap. XX." And two days later they hear from Blackwood. "Good news in general, but the sale of our books not progressing at present."

At length, on the seventh of July, they say good-by to Munich. The previous day they dined and sat a few

hours with the dear charming Siebold [Herr Siebold was an eminent comparative anatomist] from whom they parted with regret. They were glad to leave Munich, but not to leave the friends who had been so kind to them. For a week before, she had been ill—"almost a luxury," she says in her Journal, "because of the love that tended me."

On July twenty-eighth she writes thus to Sara Hennell, from Dresden:

"Since I wrote to you last I have lived through a great deal of exquisite pleasure. First an attack of illness during our last week at Munich, which I reckon among my pleasures because I was nursed so tenderly. Then a fortnight's unspeakable journey to Salzburg, Ischl, Linz, Vienna, Prague, and finally Dresden, which is our last resting-place before returning to Richmond, where we hope to be at the beginning of September. Dresden is a proper climax; for all other art seems only a preparation for feeling the superiority of the Madonna di San Sisto the more. We go three days a week to the gallery, and every day—after looking at other pictures—we go to take a parting draught of delight at Titian's Zinsgroschen and the *Einzige* Madonna." At Dresden—where they find lodgings—a whole apartment of six rooms all to themselves "for 18s. per week!"—they enjoy six weeks of quiet work, undisturbed by visits and visitors.

They were, she says, "as happy as princes—are not"—Lewes writing at the far corner of the great *salon,* she in her own private room, with closed doors. "Here," she says, "I wrote the latter half of the second volume of 'Adam Bede' in the long mornings that our early hours —rising at six o'clock—secured us."

Always it is the *Sistine Madonna* that draws this "complete rationalist." She had eyes to see glories to which most of her fellow skeptics would assuredly have been blind. One can scarcely imagaine Mr. Bray, philosopher and phrenologist, going into ecstasies over the *Madonna del Sisto,* yet this strange, this almost incalculable woman was seized, when she gazed upon it for the first time, with a sort of awe, as if she were suddenly in the living presence of some glorious being. The sensation, she says, made her heart swell too much for her to remain comfortable, and she and Lewes hurried out of the room. On subsequent mornings they always came, in the last minutes of their stay, to look at this sublime picture which they found it harder and harder to leave.

At length, one showery day at the end of August, they set out for Leipzig on their journey home. At Leipzig they spend two nights, dine at Brockhaus', see the picture gallery, whence they carry away a "lasting delight" in Calame's great landscapes and De Dreux's dogs, go to a museum and finish up with an open-air

concert. Next morning they resume their journey, traveling day and night till they reach home on September 2, 1858. Rather more than two months later—November sixteenth—she inscribed this entry in her Journal: "Wrote the last line of 'Adam Bede' and sent it to Mr. Langford. *Jubilate.*"

There are indications more than a few of the direct influence which this Continental visit had upon the composition of *Adam Bede.* Here is one drawn, perhaps, from the contemplation of her favorite Rubens. The passage occurs at the beginning of the second book and must have been written soon after her arrival in Munich:

"It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world stirring actions. I turn without shrinking from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel and her stone

jug, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessaries of life to her."

But there was another and a profounder effect that this visit had upon her, profounder than any scene of Nature or work of art that she saw, beside which the mountains or the paintings or the music were as nothing. It was that during this sojourn together it was surely made clear to her that in her union with George Henry Lewes she had found that perfect companionship of heart and mind, a companionship indissoluble save by death, for which her nature craved. The cynic may pretend to see in Lewes' continued loyalty to this writer of promise (a promise soon now to be fulfilled) something more practical, more material, than devotion of the heart. Such a suggestion would be as ignoble as it would be psychologically unsound. True, Lewes had been something of a *butineur;* he had sipped honey from a great many flowers, but he was a man of conspicuous gifts of mind and spirit and no mere philanderer. Once he had found the kindred soul, he wandered no more, because he had no temptation, no desire to wander. And so with her; she too had sought, and now she had found. In the wide welter of existence she had found a haven and a home.

" 'Adam,' said Dinah that afternoon when he went to seek her, as she came home from the Methodist meet-

ing at Slomen's End, and to ask her to be his wife, 'Adam, it is the Divine Will. My soul is so knit to yours that it is but a divided life I live without you. And this moment, now you are with me, and I feel that our hearts are filled with the same love, I have a fulness of strength to bear and do our heavenly Father's will, that I had lost before.'

"Adam paused and looked into her sincere eyes.

" 'Then we'll never part any more, Dinah, till death parts us.'

"And they kissed each other with a deep joy. . . .

"What [asks George Eliot as she closes that chapter] greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life—to strengthen each other in all labour, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent, unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting?"

It is surely no rash inference that the sentiments she has put into Dinah's heart are a reflection of the certainty, the sense of complete and final consummation that henceforth dwelt in her own.

One day toward the end of January, 1859, almost on the eve of the publication of *Adam Bede,* George Henry Lewes walked along the Thames toward Kew to meet Herbert Spencer, who was to spend the day with them.

Lewes records the fact in his diary and adds this retrospective comment: "I owe him [Spencer] a debt of gratitude, my acquaintance with him was the brightest ray in a very dreary, *wasted* period of my life. I had given up all ambition whatever, lived from hand to mouth, and thought the evil of each day sufficient. The stimulus of his intellect, especially during our long walks, roused my energy once more and revived my dormant love of science. His intense theorizing tendency was contagious, and it was only the stimulus of a *theory* which could then have induced me to work. I owe Spencer another and a deeper debt. It was through him that I learned to know Marian—to know her was to love her,—and since then my life has been a new birth. To her I owe all my prosperity and all my happiness. God bless her!"

CHAPTER XIV

ADAM BEDE had proved a great success, a great achievement; but a greater was to follow, and that in no long interval. The tide of inspiration, fed, as with innumerable tributaries, from the founts of far-off memories, was now upon her, and she took it at the flood. Visions and emotions, pictures of the past, voices from beyond the tomb come stealing in upon her inward eye and ear, dream-wrack, tangled driftage, half remembered, half imagined, evanescent, elusive multicolored things, which she must seize and unravel ere they dissolve and vanish, unravel and weave anew, giving them form and permanence. Amid this shifting phantasmagoria, this throng of memories, now defined in luminous outline, now fraying away into mist, there shines abidingly the face of a little child, a little girl. And always, whatever the scene, half real and half fanciful, that passes before her vision,—fields with the sunlight on them, shady winding lanes, river, flower-sprinkled meadow, the firelight shining through the windows of an old house at dusk,—whatever the scene, that childish figure is always there as the luminous center of it. That child

whom she knew long ago, departed mysteriously on that journey called "growing up," departed she knew not whither, even as we, all of us making that journey, have known such a child, from whom somehow or other, at what stage we know not, we have parted on the way. She will call her back, that child she knew, back out of the shadows again and with her the world in which she lived and moved and had her being, and she, and those she knew and loved shall live over again, but with a difference, the lives they lived long since.

It is because George Eliot does not describe her from without, but because she lives in Maggie Tulliver, because, in a word, she *is* Maggie Tulliver, that this, her supreme creation, is invested not with the mere semblance of life but with its convincing reality. Maggie Tulliver will last as long as the stars. She is clothed in the raiment of immortality.

Ostensibly the scene in which the drama is enacted, is far away from Arbury and Griff, far away from the meadows and cornfields of Warwickshire. Dorlcote Mill is placed amid the flats and fens, the slow-moving watercourses of Lincolnshire, a silent land of grays and greens, of wide-stretching distances, of far horizons. Yet the home of the Tullivers is really Griff, just as the dark-haired, dark-eyed, wayward, imaginative child that roams its chambers and passages and loves to be

alone with her dreams in the attic there is none other than Mary Ann Evans.

But in reality—and this is what constitutes its greatness, raising it triumphantly above the tide of merely clever and amusing fiction—the action and the actors of this story are not limited to any point of time, nor of the scene in which it is unfolded shall we say, behold here or behold there. The story is of yesterday, to-day and to-morrow. Like the drama of Elsinore it is enacted and reenacted eternally and its theater is the human heart. Everywhere and at all times, on a grander or meaner stage, the tragedy of Dorlcote Mill is being unfolded, and joy and sorrow, hope and despair, love and death make up the weft whereof it is woven.

All good writing, it has been observed, is autobiographical. A writer clothes the world with the hues of his own spirit. The men and women and the scenes which he beholds and having beheld, portrays for us anew, are no mere mechanical transcripts, no mere photographs so to speak, but pictures informed and illumined with the emotions of the beholder. You and I see a thing, say a leafless tree silhouetted against a winter sunset. We see the same tree, and the same sky, but the idea each of us forms of what we see is necessarily different. Each of us lives in a world of his own, a world shaped and colored by innumerable things beyond our

power to enumerate or define, a chain with countless links of circumstance losing itself in a vague and illimitable past. A line of Virgil, say, may move us both profoundly; we may, each of us, answer in equal measure to the thrill of it; but one thing it is safe to say, and that is that the emotions it awakens in you are not identical with the emotions it awakens in me. For each of us it is colored with the hues of our respective *egos*. Nor with whatever skill and determination we address ourselves to the task, can we guide others across the frontiers of our world and display it to him as we see it. Not George Eliot, nor another, not even Shakespeare himself, can fulfill that aim, and the world thus portrayed for us remains rigid and meaningless for us unless we can animate it with emotions derived from our own experience. It is because and in proportion as they permit us to do this, to behold in their world, that is to say, some reflection of our own, that we say such and such writers are "true to life." We are all human, we men and women who walk the earth, and though every man is a world unto himself there are certain things independent of the accidents of time and place that touch the hearts of us all and cause us to say, "Yes, that is true; my experience, or my heart, tells me that is true."

Sunt lacrimæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt.

But, the common-sense critic may observe, these claims and this language are surely disproportionate to the case. This is a novel, not a Greek tragedy; and the characters are very ordinary, unheroic people. The scene is not the Scythian desert, or

Lone Daulis and the high Cephissian vale

but a very homely and familiar region of rural England.

That is true enough. The actors and the scenes are ordinary, and the story, for all its pathos, is such as might befall any group of ordinary people in such surroundings. But the greatness of a novel or a drama does not rise with the worldly station of the characters that play their part in it; and it was George Eliot's power to reveal the heroic in the commonplace and while delineating the finite, to suggest the eternal. A tale of kings and queens may sink to the lowest depths of bombast and bathos; a tale of a country doctor, his wife and a group of rustics and provincials may touch the very pinnacle of high tragedy. The unique and distinctive greatness of *The Mill on the Floss* does not lie in the story as such, moving as it is. Nor is it explained by saying that Mrs. Glegg, or Aunt and Uncle Pullet are triumphant examples of genre painting. Nor again is it enough to emphasize the charm of the descriptive pas-

sages, such, for example, as the opening picture of Dorlcote Mill. The greatness of *The Mill on the Floss* lies not merely in the perfection of its literary execution. It appeals not only to the esthetic but to the moral sense, and its greatness is measured by its effect not only on the senses but on the mind and still more on the soul. But talking, as Mr. Tulliver frequently noted, is puzzling work. Let us, therefore, take an example:

After long grief and pain, after much toil and suffering it seemed that the clouds which had so long hung over the lives of Tom and Maggie Tulliver were at last about to lift. Tom, by dint of hard work and unfaltering resolution had paid off all the debts and regained possession of the Mill. Maggie was home again from her ill-starred elopement with Stephen Guest, ready to face the future with sad but calm determination. It seemed that the estrangement between brother and sister would soon be healed. It was the false dawn, the ray of illusory hope, which, as in a Greek tragedy, foretells that the crisis is at hand. The reconciliation was to come, and swiftly, a reconciliation beyond the power of man to make or mar.

The floods are out and Maggie who has found a boat rows across the wide dark wastes of water to the Mill to seek her brother.

" 'Alone, Maggie?' said Tom, in a voice of deep as-

tonishment, as he opened the middle window on a level with the boat.

" 'Yes, Tom. God has taken care of me, to bring me to you. Get in quickly. Is there no one else?'

" 'No,' said Tom. '. . . Give me the oars, Maggie.'

"It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water—he face to face with Maggie—that the full meaning of what had happened rushed in upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force—*it was such a new revelation to his spirit of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear*—that he was unable to ask a question. . . ."

The words which I have italicized afford a key to the message of George Eliot, to the *meaning,* of which the story, the actual characters and events, are, so to speak, merely the vehicle. There are more things in heaven and earth than either Horatio or Tom Tulliver dreamed of in his philosophy. The rampart of sense which encompasses us about in this visible tangible world, that rampart which we deem so sure and solid, is as some—George Eliot among them—have discovered, only a thin curtain, swayed with the lightest breath from the fields of eternity, and giving passageway to "thoughts beyond the reaches of the soul." A strange doctrine this for a "professed rationalist."

The great English middle class was not at fault when it admitted George Eliot into the family circle, for she is in fact, whatever her theories may have been, an intensely religious writer. The whole effect of her work is to emphasize and magnify those beliefs which, intellectually speaking, she had discarded long since. Intellectually her reactions to the spirit of the age had led her to embrace its skepticism. Her union with Lewes, though in the circumstances it might obtain the condonation, could hardly be held to merit the approval of the religious world. The very success which attended it might in some quarters be held to aggravate rather than to mitigate her offense. To the plain-minded religious person she was living with Lewes in a state of sin. Therefore, whatever the nature of her private sentiments, she had publicly at least to proclaim her disbelief in any religion which should condemn so admirable an arrangement. It would be clumsy and heavy-handed to say that she professed herself a rationalist because of her union with Lewes; but it would not be so wide of the truth to say that her union with Lewes materially assisted her to persevere in those professions. To return to the Church she would have to give up Lewes. That she could not bring herself to do. Therefore she must formulate an apologia which should explain and justify her conduct to the world. That apolo-

gia she based on intellectual emancipation, broad-mindedness, superiority to outworn creeds, and to those who continued to criticize her she could point to the happiness of her relations with Lewes and say it were well if every union blessed by the Church could turn out as happily as hers. But this separation, this voluntary exile had bred no hatred of the things she had left. Rather did she look on them with sorrowful yearning as some disinherited wanderer, returning after long years of banishment, might gaze in at the windows of his ancient home, see the glowing hearth, the happy faces within and turn away in sadness from a scene in which he could have no part.

We may profess ourselves this, we may profess ourselves that, we may even believe our professions. But what we *are,* remains with the gods. George Eliot walked, it is true, in the ranks of the philosophers and the *esprits forts* of her day. But how often she was fain to turn aside and to cast a wistful glance backward along the road she had come. She was, when we come to sum her up, much less a philosopher and more a poet than she herself suspected. The philosophy, and with it the rationalism, of which she made so much will pass away, but her poetry, the poetry which, triumphing over all obstacles as the sun dispels the mist, illumines her best work, will never fade, or grow old. Life

changed for her, as it changed for Tom and Maggie; yet Tom and Maggie were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and loves of these first years would always make part of their lives. And so it was with her. "The wood I walk in this mild May day," she muses, "with the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet—what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill such deep and delicate fibres within me as this home scene? These familiar flowers, these well-remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capricious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations of the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. Our delight in the sunshine on the deep-bladed grass to-day, might be no more than the faint perception of wearied souls, if it were not for the sunshine and the grass in the far-off years which still live in us, and transform our perception into love."

The story of *The Mill on the Floss,* of the financial downfall of the Tullivers, of Maggie's love-affair with Philip Wakem, the deformed, artistic and morbidly

sensitive son of the lawyer to whom old Tulliver ascribed his ruin, her brother Tom's scornful repudiation of her on this account, her elopement with the rich and handsome Stephen Guest, the affianced lover of her cousin Lucy, her eleventh-hour repentance, the flood and final destruction of the Mill, the reconciliation of brother and sister before, locked in a last embrace, they were drowned in the waters of the flood, all this has been told too often to need telling again.

The contrast, or as it is fashionable to call it, the conflict, is between Maggie, the impetuous, the wayward, the generous, Maggie, the dreamer, Maggie with her sensitive and imaginative ardor, and the stolid, practical, prosaic, self-sufficient, tyrannical but utterly straightforward and wholly honest nature of her brother Tom; and then in a greater or less degree with the world as represented by the people about her: Aunt and Uncle Glegg, Aunt and Uncle Pullet and Aunt and Uncle Deane, by all perhaps save her father who loved his little wench and always took her part against those who would chide and correct her, and Bob Jakin and Philip Wakem. With Philip Wakem because he too is a dreamer and a visionary like herself and with whom because he is deformed and an object of pity she falls in love, and he with her. But to read books together, to enjoy music, to talk about poetry is the intellectual side

of love and, in this case, compassion played its part and it was a large one.

But there was another side to the dark-haired, dark-eyed Maggie, other yearnings which these sublimated unincarnate devotions left unrequited. When, therefore, that handsome, rather dashing and self-confident young man, Mr. Stephen Guest, appeared on the scene, his triumph, if short-lived, was complete, or nearly so. Sir Leslie Stephen professes to find it unexpected; he calls it, in fact, this capitulation of Maggie's,—an "irrelevant and discordant degradation." Mr. Guest he says roundly, is "a typical provincial coxcomb . . . fitted no doubt to excite the admiration of young ladies at St. Ogg's." He is indeed betrothed to that pattern of virtue and ladylike deportment, Lucy Deane, Maggie's cousin. And because Maggie is so decidedly above the general run of provincial young ladies, Sir Leslie Stephen thinks this young man could have no attraction for her, which surely shows that this excellent critic's knowledge of his George Eliot, of his Maggie and of human nature was seriously incomplete. To begin with, he underestimates the qualities, the attractions, of Stephen Guest. "A self-satisfied commonplace young gentleman," he calls him. Certainly this young Lothario is made to scent himself with "attar of roses" which, it can not be denied, is an offense against good breeding;

but one is inclined to regard this as the kind of thing a woman novelist might easily make her hero do. If a man had been drawing him he would have drawn him differently; but if his portrait is distorted it is not so distorted that we can not see the author's intention. Let us then refrain from being too exacting and say that Mr. Stephen Guest was just the young man not only to turn the heads of the young ladies of St. Ogg's, but to make a very decided, if transient appeal to the passionate side of Maggie's nature. Moreover, if Stephen took Maggie off her feet, it is clear that Maggie did not a whit less for Stephen, and when at a ball Stephen takes her into a conservatory and "a mad impulse" seizes him to shower kisses on her arm it is a little unkind of our Victorian critic to observe, in his well-bred, disdainful manner, that "Mr. Stephen Guest's performance does not strike one in the sacramental light." The fact is that the passions are rather vulgar things and apt to play havoc with the rules which etiquette would lay down for the maintenance of decorum in social intercourse; and if, on the sight of Maggie, Stephen forgot his Lucy and was then and there whirled away by the gust of this new passion, he at least has an example in Romeo who, when he set eyes for the first time on Juliet, became no less promptly oblivious of that Rosalind to whom he had before professed undying devotion. "It

is," says Sir Leslie Stephen, summing up a defense that had been made of this development of the story, "no doubt painful and disagreeable that a young woman of so many noble qualities should be guilty of such a step; but noble young women do make slips—that, I fear, is undeniable—and Maggie behaves as might be expected from her previous history. That is where I presume to doubt. . . . Nobody," the same critic continues, ". . . can deny that the passion of love is apt to generate illusions. . . . I will not deny that even Maggie's love for Stephen is conceivable. . . . But, one thing seems to be obvious. The whole theme of the book is surely the contrast between the 'beautiful soul' and the commonplace surroundings. It is the awakening of the spiritual and imaginative nature and the need of finding some room for the play of the higher faculties whether in the direction of religious mysticism or of human affection. That such a character, with little experience of life and with narrow education, should fall into error is natural, if not inevitable. But then the error should surely correspond to some impulse which we can feel to be noble. Maggie may be wrong in attributing high qualities to her hero; but we should feel that, in her eyes, he has high qualities, and that the passion, if misdirected, is itself congenial to her better impulses. . . . As Maggie, by her

very definition, as one may say, is a highly exceptional young woman, she should surely have something exceptional in her love. . . . We could have understood it if she had fallen in love with the excellent vicar of St. Ogg's who would have been able to talk about à Kempis and religious sentimentalism."

Alas, in real life, matters are seldom arranged so conveniently, whatever may happen in novels. Mr. Stephen Guest, Sir Leslie Stephen will have it, was a very poor animal. An animal he was no doubt, but not so poor a one, perhaps, as our critic insists. Yet Lucy Deane, his destined mate, was a very pallid individuality indeed, and this match had certainly been brought about by the languid and haphazard operation of circumstance rather than by any action of volition on the part of Lucy or Stephen. But when Maggie dawned upon the scene, the air immediately became charged with electricity. There was a rushing together of the invisible spirits, and the crisis which causes so much pain to Sir Leslie Stephen was, from the moment of their first meeting, both natural and inevitable. For Maggie, that "highly exceptional young woman," was a creature of strong and tumultuous passions which, suddenly awakened into life, bore her irresistibly away. For Philip, Maggie entertained an affection born of sympathy and pity and of a consonance of tastes; for

Stephen, she was carried away by a passion fired by the very clash and contrast of their natures, by imagination engendered by the proximity of the positive and negative poles.

Sir Leslie Stephen's criticism of the relations between Maggie and Stephen Guest is not the only one. Long before him, Bulwer Lytton had expressed his strong disapproval of it. They were wrong and showed themselves bad psychologists. It is a question of something forceful, elemental, instinctive, and both for Bulwer Lytton and Sir Leslie Stephen life had been too long refined upon for such feelings as these not to have become attenuated almost to the vanishing point. With Maggie, that is to say with Mary Ann Evans, it was different. She was only a generation removed from the original sap, which was strong in the nature of Robert Evans, her father, though it had not overflowed into unlawful channels; it probably sang no less strongly in the veins of her mother, the yeoman's daughter. It is well sometimes to call a spade a spade. Let it therefore be recognized without further ado that Maggie, for all her intellectual and artistic sensibilities, for all her love of books and music, was a creature of strong animal appetites and instincts. So also was Tom; but in Tom they found vent in a dogged, brutal, sullen determination, while in Maggie they manifested themselves in

fits of waywardness, impetuous and uncalculating impulse. The force which impelled Tom Tulliver to keep on the lines was just as passionate as the force which at a certain crisis in her career drove Maggie off them. Tom's stubbornness and Maggie's impetuousness were but allotropic forms of the same untamable animal instinct; but with the former it was centripetal; with the latter centrifugal. A generous sin outshines a smug virtue, and then and now and always "the publicans and the harlots go into heaven before you." "Maggie's position towards Stephen," says George Eliot in a letter to Blackwood, who had forwarded her Bulwer Lytton's criticism, "is too vital a part of my whole conception and purpose for me to be converted to the condemnation of it. If I am wrong there—if I did not know what my heroine would feel and do under the circumstances in which I deliberately placed her—I ought not to have written this book at all, but quite a different book, if any. If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble, but liable to great error—error that is anguish to its own nobleness —then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology."

From what we know of Bulwer Lytton and his own contributions to fiction it is not surprising that his

"highly accomplished mind" failed to understand the character of Maggie. From the nature of the case, and from the nature of the critic, such a failure was inevitable. And then comes Sir Leslie Stephen, with his donnish complacent superiority, his superficial *a priori* theories of consistency, to tell us that the elopement with Stephen which is the very crux and climax of the whole tragedy, a thing implicit from the very beginning in Maggie's nature—to tell us, with an air of well-bred, good-humored superciliousness, that it is "irrelevant." To say that the climax comes too suddenly, to say that the end is inadequately prepared, is one thing and is perhaps true enough. To say that this climax, this ripping up of the track on which she was traveling, was contradictory to the nature of Maggie (presumably because Stephen did not bring to St. Ogg's the manners of the Balliol Common Room) is an error so vital as to rob of all significance whatever else of praise or blame the critic who makes it may pronounce about the book.

There is a sense in which the very perfection of the genre painting, in which the book abounds, a sense in which the Rembrandt-like delineation of Aunt Glegg and all the other members of that immortal company of aunts and uncles, is almost a drawback, almost to be regretted, as affording too much humorous relief and performing its necessary office a little too completely

and so tending to dazzle—to divert us a little over long from the contemplation of that thing of lyrical beauty which is the story—so simple, so consistent, so inevitable—of the lives of Tom and Maggie Tulliver. Inevitable and ineluctable as that day should be swallowed up in the gloom of night is the final scene in the boat adrift on the wide waters of the flood, when with destruction bearing down swiftly upon them they lived through again "in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together." And as day is born anew out of the night, so out of that flood, the forms of Tom and Maggie rise up immortal and irresistibly precious,

> More moving-delicate and full of life
> Than when they lived indeed.

If Lewes, that strange little compound of earth and sky, of Ariel and Caliban, ever hinted at the lucrative prospects of a happy ending, the temptation, God be praised, was set aside. The bourgeois ears of the British public were cheated of the marriage bells which sounded so sickly sweet in *Adam Bede*. But to do the British public justice, it bore no malice. On the contrary it bought up the book in thousands.

Blackwood's terms were sufficiently liberal: two thou-

sand pounds for four thousand copies of the three-volume edition, one hundred and fifty pounds for one thousand at twelve shillings and sixty pounds for one thousand at six shillings. If the book were to sell at the same rate as *Adam Bede,* the author would have reason to congratulate herself. It did. And all material or financial anxieties were henceforth at an end. The last eleven pages of *The Mill on the Floss* were written at white heat on the morning of the twenty-first of March. At frequent intervals during the composition of the book the intermittent melancholy from which she suffered all her life descended upon her. Even when she had finished the second volume of the story, when the beauty of her creation hurrying now toward its perfect efflorescence must have been visible to her eyes—even then the old misgivings return to torment her.

"I have been invalided," she wrote, "for the last week, and, of course, am a prisoner in the castle of Giant Despair, who growls in my ear that *The Mill on the Floss* is detestable and that the last volume will be the climax of that general detestableness."

The title, *The Mill on the Floss,* is one of the perfect titles in fiction despite the slight inaccuracy—the Mill not being on the Floss but on its tributary, the Ripple. It was not decided upon without considerable debate. The first suggestion was *Sister Maggie,* which Oscar

Browning thought, strangely enough, "would have been a far better title." Lewes preferred *The Tullivers; or, Life on the Floss,* which George Eliot thought had the advantage—which it certainly had not—of "slipping off the lazy English tongue." To Blackwood is due, it appears, the credit of suggesting the title finally adopted.

George Eliot had always disliked the house at Wandsworth—which they had taken for three years—and now it is becoming intolerable, all wind and dust and publicity. At length they succeed in finding some one to take it off their hands and move into a furnished house, Number 10, Harewood Square. Here they remain six weeks and then take up their quarters in a residence of their own, Number 16, Blandford Square. The removal from Wandsworth brought with it only one regret and that was a heavy one: it put many miles between her and her friends the Congreves. To Mrs. Congreve she had grown deeply attached and the prospect of seeing her henceforth only at comparatively rare intervals was to her a cause of unfeigned regret. But until Lewes' sons, "our boys" as she calls them, were educated and put out in the world, a residence in the metropolis was a matter of necessity. Charles Lewes, the eldest, a charming and highly intelligent young man had secured a good position in the post-office. He

had acquitted himself brilliantly, heading the list in the examination which gave him admittance to this branch of the Civil Service. "Our big boy," she says, in a letter to Mrs. Bray, "is a great delight to us, and makes our home doubly cheery. It is very sweet as one gets old to have some young life about one. He is quite a passionate musician, and we play Beethoven duets with increasing appetite every evening. The opportunity of hearing some inspiring music is one of the chief benefits we hope for to counterbalance our loss of the wide common and the fields."

The opportunity for hearing good music which their life in London offered, is the grand compensation for what was after all a life of exile and again and again she makes reference to it in her letters. "If you had not repressed our hope of seeing you again until your sister's return, I should have asked you to join us for the Exeter Hall performance of the 'Messiah' this evening, which I am looking forward to with delight." And again, "After all the bustle of Monday, I went to hear Sims Reeves sing 'Adelaide,'—that *ne plus ultra* of passionate song,—and I wish you had been there for one quarter of an hour, that you might have heard it too."

As for the theater and her appreciation of the drama, there is one passage, in a letter to her friend, Sara Hennell, which, though many, perhaps most, people

would dissent from the sentiment it expresses or implies, reveals her to me as a true lover of the theater, as an authentic child of the stage. "In opposition," she says, "to most people, who love to *read* Shakespeare, I like to see his plays acted better than any others: his great tragedies thrill me, let them be acted how they may. I think it is something like what I used to experience in old days in listening to uncultured preachers—the emotions lay hold of one too strongly for one to care about the medium. Before all other plays I find myself cold and critical, seeing nothing but actors and 'properties.' I like going to those little provincial theatres. One's heart streams out to the poor devils of actors who get so little clapping, and will go home to so poor a supper." That does credit alike to her heart and to her head. To the present writer it strikes home with extraordinary poignancy. Long ago, I went to a "missa cantata" in a poor little church in some out-of-the-way village in Ireland. Never—speaking humanly and in no narrow artistic sense—have I ever beheld anything so touching and so beautiful and so pathetic and so grand. I have been in churches in great cities where every resource of art was brought into play, majestic architecture, glorious windows, entrancing music. I doubt whether it sounded so sweetly in God's ear as the voices of those rustic singers or the quavering intoning

of their frail old priest. It is a view of the stage, of the function of art that disposes at once of the cinema as an artistic medium, of the cinema which, the more complex and elaborate it becomes, grows more and more alien to the Muses. Helicon and Hollywood are more than a universe apart.

And George Henry Lewes, what is he doing, and how is he comporting himself all this time? He is learning —or rather he has already learned—the secret of playing that most difficult of all instruments, namely "second fiddle." While George Eliot is performing before an audience as vast, and vaster than the whole English-speaking world, and receiving the homage of all, Lewes has to be content with an obscure and very secondary position. But his gaiety, his good humor, his kindness of heart, which never failed him in the old days of struggle and hardship, when all but a few had turned their backs upon them, showed no signs of abatement now that the position was reversed and his modest little light was swallowed up and lost in the blaze of glory that shone like an aureole about his wife. Yes, his wife. The author of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* now felt herself able to speak with a vehemence and authoritativeness she would scarcely have presumed to employ in her days of obscurity. Listen to the rebuke she administers—with a sort of grave, *ex cathedra* tone,

to her friend Mrs. Peter Taylor, who it would seem had perpetrated the unspeakable blunder of addressing a letter to *Miss Evans.* It is eloquent of the bitterness, the loneliness that entered into her soul, in those days when, "having taken the step," she paid for it with the coldness and estrangement of all save a handful of her friends. Even the Brays, those very advanced people, had felt that the situation was decidedly unpleasant. It is one thing to hold opinions, one thing also to express them, but quite another thing to act upon them. That sort of thing may become terribly embarrassing.

"It gave me pleasure to have your letter," says George Eliot to Mrs. Taylor, "not only because of the kind expressions of sympathy it contains, but also because it gives me an opportunity of telling you, after the lapse of years, that I remember gratefully how you wrote to me with generous consideration and belief at a time when most persons who knew anything of me were disposed (naturally enough) to judge me rather severely. Only a woman of rare qualities would have written to me as you did on the strength of the brief intercourse that had passed between us. . . .

"It was never a trial to me [she goes on] to have been cut off from what is called the world, and I think I love none of my fellow-creatures the less for it: still I must always retain a peculiar regard for those who

showed me any kindness in word or deed at that time, when there was the least evidence in my favour. The list of those who did so is a short one, so that I can often and easily recall it." And then, very directly, almost sternly, she proceeds to make the position quite clear, and to show how she and her "husband" are to be treated by all who set a value on her friendship:

"For the last six years I have ceased to be 'Miss Evans' for any one who has personal relations with me—having held myself under all the responsibilities of a married woman. I wish this to be distinctly understood; and when I tell you that we have a great boy of eighteen at home who calls me 'mother' as well as two other boys, almost as tall, who write to me under the same name, you will understand that the point is not one of mere egoism or personal dignity, when I request that any one who has a regard for me will cease to speak of me by my maiden name."

Such then was the position: George Eliot rapidly taking on the attributes and receiving the veneration of a prophetess or sibyl; George Henry Lewes, her loyal and devoted attendant, intervening between her and every kind of material trouble and shielding her from every vexation. He was her factotum and general man of business, her emissary and her go-between, always eager, always cheerful, always doing his best to give her

encouragement and drive away her despondency, obedient to her slightest wish, yet never failing to give her sound and excellent advice. He was a queer little oddity of a man, this actor-philosopher, scientist and man-of-letters; he too, like her, suffered from headaches and general ill-health. But he was never morose, never despondent, and like the hero that he was, he dissembled his indisposition lest the knowledge of it should cloud the serenity of his companion.

It is true that the intimacy of the earlier days of their life in common had, since the home-coming of Charles from his school in Switzerland, in large measure been interrupted, nor was it destined to be regained until all three of Lewes' children had passed out from the paternal home to pursue their several avocations in the world. But the responsibilities thus laid upon her she discharged with exemplary exactitude and tenderness unfailing. But the glow never faded from this marriage of true minds. Up to the very end he retained all the warmth, all the tender affection which he had lavished on her at the beginning of their association, and she, never losing the delight and comfort, the entertainment and encouragement, the solace and inspiration she found in his society, found in him, as the years went by, an ever surer and more necessary stay. If to the world the rôle of this little man of genius was a secondary

one, he knew and she too must have known, that without him the gifts with which she was so richly endowed would never have been made known to the world. He was at once the Philip and the Stephen to her Maggie, answering the voice of her spirit and the call of her blood.

That the world should turn its back on them or view them with cold condemning eyes, is not to be wondered at. The world was right. It must keep steadily on the track marked out for it. Stern moralists and narrow ones may call her conduct sin. It was an offense against society, but whether or not it was a sin depends upon the answer to the question whether or not, laying some "flattering unction to her soul," she was wilfully disobeying the voice of her conscience. And what that voice whispered to her who save she could tell?

That her brother Isaac and her sister Chrissey should regard her with cold disapproval is not to be marveled at. The family tribunal is generally the seat from which justice untempered by mercy is dispensed. But when, stricken with mortal illness, Chrissey lay upon her death-bed, the estranging barrier was broken down and the sisters who, for all their differences in temperament —the elder so placid and docile, the younger so wayward and impetuous—had so loved each other as children, were again united in a last embrace. Chrissey's

husband, Mr. Clarke, had died some time before, and now by her own death, her children were left orphans —orphans, but not without a friend. George Eliot undertook to see to their welfare, and in the tenderness with which she watched over them she was loyal to her sister's memory and true to her own heart. With Isaac, too, reconciliation was to come, but the time was not yet. The last words of *The Mill on the Floss* were written on March 21, 1860. The manuscript bears the following inscription:

"To my beloved husband, George Henry Lewes, I give this MS. of my third book, written in the sixth year of our life together, at Holly Lodge, South Field, Wandsworth, and finished 21st March 1860."

Having completed the task, the last eleven pages of which, she says, were written in a *furor,* the feeling of *malaise,* of depression, of anxiety descended upon her. She was conscious of a longing to get away, to seek rest and change and to bathe her spirit in new scenes.

"I am grateful and yet rather sad to have finished," she writes to John Blackwood, "—sad that I shall live with my people on the banks of the Floss no longer. But it is time that I should go and absorb some new life, and gather fresh ideas." Within a few days she and Lewes are on their way to Italy, to Rome, which they hope to reach on Palm Sunday.

CHAPTER XV

THE visit to Italy, though suddenly decided on, was no new project. "I had looked forward for years to the journey to Italy," she writes in her Journal, "rather with the hope of the new elements it would bring to my culture than with the hope of immediate pleasure." She had traveled enough to know the disappointments and the annoyances that inevitably attend upon the process, and to realize that the valuable part of it is not what we see so much as what we remember, those visions of scenes seen and recorded at moments when the mind and the eye are perhaps weary and over-wrought, but which in after years reveal themselves in tranquil beauty and with an undreamed-of significance to that "inward eye" which, as the poet tells us, is "the bliss of solitude."

Of this visit to the Eternal City her Journal contains some precious and characteristic records. She was deeply impressed by the outlook from the tower of the Roman Capitol—the mountains that bound the Campagna, the Sabine and Alban hills. The solitary Soracte arrested her gaze as nearly two thousand years ago it had arrested the gaze of one of her favorite poets:

Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte, . . .

She looked with awe upon the Palatine crowned with the ruins of the Palace of the Cæsars, on the grand temple of Antoninus and Faustina; the white arch of Titus; the Basilica of Constantine. She was delighted in the drive from the Clivus to the Coliseum, in the drive along the Appian Way to the tomb of Cæcelia Metella and the view from thence of the Campagna bridged by the aqueduct; in the impressive vastness of the Coliseum and the Baths of Caracalla. But there was a spectacle which seems to have impressed her more vividly even than these stately relics of the classic past, a spectacle not of Imperial but of Papal Rome, a spectacle which compensated these diligent students of history and archeology for "wearisome ceremonies and closed museums" (they had timed their visit for Holy Week), and that was the illumination of Saint Peter's. "That," she writes, "really is a thing so wondrous, so magically beautiful, that one can't find in one's heart to say it is not worth doing. I remember well the first glimpse we had, as we drove out towards it, of the outline of the dome like a new constellation on the black sky. I thought *that* was the final illumination, and was regretting our tardy arrival, from the *détour* we had to make,

when, as our carriage stopped in front of the cathedral, the great bell sounded, and in an instant the grand illumination flashed out and turned the outline of stars into a palace of gold. Venus looked on palely."

On the fourth of April, their fourth day in Rome, she takes advantage of a wet day, the first since they left Paris, to write to her friend Mrs. Congreve. The letter is full of high spirits and enthusiasm for all the marvels of this marvelous place. "I have been gradually rising from the depth of disappointment to an intoxication of delight." She had been depressed on her arrival as she rode in the omnibus and looked through its windows at street after street of ugly modern Rome. In that mood even the dome of Saint Peter's and the Castle of Saint Angelo left her cold. But when next morning she mounted the Capitol and looked out on the Forum and the Coliseum, far on to the Alban mountains, with snowy Apennines behind them, her disappointment turned to wonder and delight.

She sees Cavour—"in plainest dress, with a head full of power mingled with *bonhomie*"—who was waiting with other eminences at the Turin station to receive the Prince de Carignan, the new viceroy of Tuscany. The Prince was not a pleasant sight—"a large, stout 'moustache,' squeezed in at the waist with a gold belt, looking like one of those dressed-up personages who are

among the chessmen that the Cavours of the world play their game with."

She is mightily taken with the looks of the populace. "Oh, the beautiful men and women and children here!" she writes. "Such wonderful babies with wise eyes!—such grand-featured mothers nursing them. As one drives along the streets sometimes one sees a madonna and child at every third or fourth upper window." They visit Shelley's tomb where it is like a personal consolation to see the simple outward sign that he is at rest, "where no hatred can ever reach him again." And Keats' tombstone with its despairing bitter inscription:

"Here lies one whose name was writ in water"

is to her almost as painful to think of as Swift's.

After the manner of good British tourists they do not fail to "assist" at the numerous religious ceremonies which are taking place in Rome in this, the great festival of the Church's year, and of course the comments on these ceremonies strike the true British note; they are "a melancholy, hollow business." However she knelt to receive the Pope's blessing, remembering what Pius VII said to the soldier—that he would never be the worse for the blessing of an old man.

Not to be a socialist, a reformer or revolutionary in

one's twenties some one has said argues a hard heart; to remain one after one is forty, a soft head. George Eliot had now passed her eighth lustrum, and her ideas were rapidly mellowing. "What a delight it would be to take the old walks in Geneva once more," she writes to her friend and translator, Monsieur D'Albert. "But I fear there are many changes that would check the current of my memory. And," she adds significantly, "the change from the old to the new is always painful to us who are getting old and living more and more in the past. Tell Maman I enter now into her conservative feelings, which I used inwardly to disapprove in my revolutionary mood—the mood I was in when you knew me." But the truth is that ever since she began to write fiction George Eliot had been living in the past, dwelling long and tenderly on the scenes of her childhood, that past world which seemed, as she gazed back upon it, so full of grace and charm.

From Rome, whither they had gone in the worst spring that had been known for twenty years, they journey to Naples, longing at the last to come southward in search of sunshine, and Naples they both of them think "the most wonderful place in the world." And after Naples—Pæstum, Amalfi, Castellamare and Sorrento, and then finally Florence, where they seek out the quietest hotel so as to be "clear of the stream of English and

Americans, in which one finds one's self in all the main tracks of travel." Here in Florence which, from its relation to the history of Modern Art roused a keener interest in them even than Rome, there came to her the first suggestion of an idea that was to bear important fruit. The visit, she writes in a letter to Major Blackwood, "has stimulated me to entertain rather an ambitious project, which I mean to be a secret from every one but you and Mr. John Blackwood." The idea thus referred to was, as we shall see, not to be brought to maturity and delivered to the world without much toil and pain.

> Tasks in hours of insight will'd
> Through hours of gloom must be fulfill'd

says the poet. That is true, and never more true than of *Romola,* her first—and last—historical novel.

The Leweses bade farewell to Florence on the evening of the first of June, traveling all night by diligence and until eleven the next morning to get to Bologna. "Wonderful heights and depths I saw"—in the journey across the Apennines—by the fading light of the evening. In the middle of the night she awoke to find the lightning flashing and the sky heavy with threatening storm-clouds and the six horses "resolutely refusing or unable to move the diligence—till at last two meek

oxen were tied to the axle" and helped to drag them up the hill. Then came Padua and the Arena Chapel and long hours spent in admiration of Giotto, and from Padua to Venice with which they were so enchanted that they were seduced into staying there a whole week instead of three or four days. "Of all dreamy delights," she says, "that of floating in a gondola along the canals and out on the Lagoon is surely the greatest."

From Venice to Verona and Milan and thence to Como. At Bellagio, where they arrive by steamer in the evening, they spend "a delicious day" going in the morning to the Villa Somma Riva and in the evening to the Serbellone Gardens from the heights of which they see the mountain peaks reddened with the last rays of the sun. Como and Bellagio—she had visited these places eleven years before, in company with the Brays, and the days were not "delicious" then. "How wretched I was then—how peevish, how utterly morbid!" she exclaimed in a letter of reminiscence to Mrs. Bray. "I should like you [she goes on] now and then to feel happy in the thought that you were always perfectly good to me. That I was not good to you is my own disagreeable affair: the bitter taste of that fact is mine, not yours." One wonders whether Mrs. Bray knew what magic influence had wrought this remarkable change, and cast the glamour of enchantment over mountain,

lake and valley. The wizard was a queer ugly little man and his name was George Henry Lewes. Next day they reach "lovely Chiavenna" and spend the evening in company with a glorious mountain torrent, mountain peaks, huge boulders with rippling miniature torrents and lovely young flowers among them, and grassy heights with rich Spanish chestnuts shadowing them. Then next morning, they climb, in blinding torrents of rain, the almost perpendicular heights of the Splügen. On the following day came the climax of grand—nay, terrible—scenery as they traversed the Via Mala, after which came open green valleys, with dotted white churches and homesteads. It was Switzerland and on the twenty-first of June "the mighty wall of the Valtelline Alps" shut them out from Italy. At Zurich they spend a day in the company of Moleschott, the physiologist,—"an interview that has helped to sharpen Mr. Lewes's appetite for a return to his microscope and dissecting-table," she writes in a letter dated from Berne to John Blackwood, adding: "We ought to be for ever ashamed of ourselves if we don't work the better for this great holiday." And then comes another reference to the mysterious idea. "I don't think I can venture to tell you what my great project is by letter, for I am anxious to keep it a secret. It will require a great deal of study and labour, and I am athirst to begin." There

were to be moments, and not a few of them, when she was to wish that she had never begun.

But every now and again she is conscious of the premonitory intimation, of

> The first faint hesitant elusive hint
> Of that invasion of the vandal years.

She seems to feel that she has reached, or will soon reach, the summit of the hill and that the rest of the way will be downward into the valley. As we have seen she visited the D'Alberts at Geneva and spent two days with them. "Maman" she found as bright, as upright as ever: only her hair had grown white in the ten-year interval—"a change," George Eliot remarks, "which makes her face all the softer in colouring." And "Maman" was just as sympathetic, just as tender to her "Minie" as of old, apparently not disapproving in the least of George Henry Lewes, who was "delighted" with her. Truly George Henry, who could thus secure the favor of a white-haired old lady, and a regular churchgoer, in the heart of Calvin's own city, had a way with him. Now back to England, Minie sends this large-hearted, forbearing old lady, a keepsake as an earnest of her affections. "Here, then," she writes, "is the lock of hair which, now it is severed from its com-

panions, may be mistaken for a lock from some youthful head, full of brightest hopes. My hopes, you know, were never very bright, even in my youthful days, and it was always my *fears* that painted my future for me. That [she adds philosophically] has, at least, saved me from some disappointment and has brought me some unexpected joys in life. For instance, I had never ventured to hope that you would bear me so tenderly in your mind through long years, and gladden my heart by such strong sympathy as your eyes and voice assured me of during our short stay with you."

CHAPTER XVI

THE mysterious project, the project she had darkly hinted to John Blackwood during her Italian tour—what was it? She then told Blackwood she would put off divulging it till she could see him face to face. Nevertheless it is a letter that reveals the secret to him. On August 28, 1860, she writes him as follows:

"I think I must tell you the secret, though I am distrusting my power to make it grow into a published fact. When we were in Florence, I was rather fired with the idea of writing a historical romance—scene, Florence; period the close of the fifteenth century, which was marked by Savonarola's career and martyrdom. Mr. Lewes [she continues] has encouraged me to persevere in the project, saying that I should probably do something in historical romance rather different in character from what has been done before."

That, then, was the project. After what mental tortures, what fits of depression and despair it was accomplished, and how nearly it came to be laid aside altogether, will be narrated in due time. But before *Romola* George Eliot was to produce another work which,

though she herself held it to be no more than a sort of parergon, was to complete the tetralogy of English country and character on which her enduring fame depends.

"I am engaged now," so runs an entry made in her Journal in November, 1860, "in writing a story . . . which has thrust itself between me and the other book I was meditating. It is 'Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe.'" The story she says, a little later, in a letter to John Blackwood, "came to me quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen weaver with a bag on his back; but as my mind dwelt on the subject, I became inclined to a more realistic treatment."

Many critics, with their minds fixed on such things as "composition," "balance," "arrangement," the due disposition of light and shade, see in *Silas Marner* George Eliot's finest achievement. That may be, yet I confess that the actual story is one calculated to excite a very pallid interest indeed. So far as the mere tale goes it is too sentimentally idyllic, too remote from probability and experience to have any hold on the mind as a criticism of life, and but for one thing it might have been written as a poem (as its author first conceived it) and have so earned like the rest of George Eliot's poetry a not unmerited oblivion. But that "one thing" is car-

dinal. *Silas Marner* "is saved from excess of sentimentalism," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "by those admirable passages of humour. . . ."

An eminent, or at least a prominent, critic of to-day has declared that Thomas Hardy could not write. It may be wondered whether, if Hardy had not been buried (all save the heart of him) in Westminster Abbey, had not been acclaimed by the press and received the homage of a people, this critic's judgment might have been a little less emphatic, a little less bitter. Whether or not it be true that Hardy could not write (and there is a sense, we think, in which it is decidedly true), there is no doubt that even Mr. George Moore would have thought twice before saying it of George Eliot. George Eliot could write, and she knew it. It is her great defect. It was her besetting sin, that she was always letting her pen run away with her. If she had written a little less easily, she might have written better. Her Muse will so often insist on walking—or rather "proceeding"—as if to receive an honorary degree. She is too much given to parading her academicals. But when this prodigious faculty was in abeyance or kept under proper control, when her genius, as distinguished from her talent, guided her hand, the result was sometimes triumphant. Such a triumph is the scene in the "Rainbow Inn." Sir Leslie Stephen regards it as "per-

haps the best specimen of her humour." This though it was "perhaps" intended to be warm, sounds cold. Possibly it was held to be indecorous and ungentlemanlike to exhibit enthusiasm. The Victorian age was, outwardly at least, a sedate age; and Sir Leslie Stephen was a sedate critic. The age and the critic alike deserve our respectful admiration, and a little imitation of them would be no harm in the present generation. Nevertheless, here, if anywhere, we surely have a piece of writing, a piece of literature concerning which even the most circumspect of critics might, as the saying is, "have let himself go." For it is not, merely, that "it is perhaps the best specimen of her humour," though that (and without the qualifying adverb) is true, but that it is among the best specimens of any humor that was ever cast into the form of literature. These people seated round the fireside in the bar-parlor at the Rainbow live, they live *en chair et en os,* and they live because they are themselves and none other. They have an advantage over Dolly Winthrop, another excellent character in the same book who has been compared and not unjustly compared with Mrs. Poyser; and that advantage I think may be explained as follows: In the case of Mrs. Winthrop (as also, to some extent, in that of Mrs. Poyser) George Eliot does not so much become Mrs. Winthrop, as Mrs. Winthrop George Eliot. The metempsychosis

is not utterly and uniformly complete. Rob Mrs. Winthrop of her dialect and the illusion would be destroyed, if not completely then at least partly; if not always, then at least often. Not so the customers of the Rainbow. Put their sayings into whatever language you will, it matters not. Dialect or no dialect, their individualities remain. There they sit, living, breathing, vivid realities.

The scene—the inn parlor—who that knows the country or knew it at least in the days when the farmers used to drive in their spring carts to market, with their wives in their Sunday best—who that has once read it could forget that scene:

"The conversation, which was at a high pitch of animation when Silas approached the door of the Rainbow, had, as usual, been slow and intermittent when the company first assembled. The pipes began to be puffed in a silence which had an air of severity; the more important customers, who drank spirits and sat nearest the fire, staring at each other as if a bet were depending on the first man who winked; while the beer-drinkers, chiefly men in fustian jackets and smock-frocks, kept their eyelids down and rubbed their hands across their mouths, as if their draughts of beer were a funereal duty attended with embarrassing sadness. At last, Mr. Snell, the landlord, a man of a neutral disposition, accustomed

to stand aloof from human differences as those of beings who were all alike in need of liquor, broke silence by saying in a doubtful tone to his cousin the butcher—

" 'Some folks 'ud say that was a fine beast you druv in yesterday, Bob?'

"The butcher, a jolly, smiling, red-haired man, was not disposed to answer rashly. He gave a few puffs before he spat and replied, 'And they wouldn't be fur wrong, John.'

"After this feeble delusive thaw, the silence set in as severely as before.

" 'Was it a red Durham?' said the farrier, taking up the thread of discourse after the lapse of a few minutes.

"The farrier looked at the landlord, and the landlord looked at the butcher, as the person who must take the responsibility of answering.

" 'Red it was,' said the butcher, in his good-humoured husky treble—'and a Durham it was.'

" 'Then you needn't tell *me* who you bought it of,' said the farrier, looking round with some triumph; 'I know who it is has got the red Durhams o' this countryside. And she'd a white star on her brow, I'll bet a penny?' The farrier leaned forward with his hands on his knees as he put this question, and his eyes twinkled knowingly.

" 'Well; yes—she might,' said the butcher, slowly,

considering that he was giving a decided affirmative. 'I don't say contrairy.'

" 'I knew that very well,' said the farrier, throwing himself backward again, and speaking defiantly; 'if *I* don't know Mr. Lammeter's cows, I should like to know who does—that's all.' "

And then begins a dialogue which, for truth to life and character, for richness of humor has rarely been equaled and certainly never surpassed in the whole range of English fiction. But it must be read as a whole. Detached sentences, however effective they may appear, fail to give the atmosphere of the scene, and the atmosphere created by means of little deft touches, little strokes so unobtrusive yet so *malins,* is all important. The dialogue is so convincing because it is not too clever, the interlocutors are not made to speak "above their station," so to say. Mr. Macey, whom one critic describes as a sort of male Mrs. Poyser, is not so preternaturally brilliant as that astonishing woman. He is not infrequently rude and sometimes a little bitter. The air these men breathe is the air of Bœotia, not the air of Attica, and it is made the heavier with the fumes of tobacco and beer and fustian. Mrs. Poyser is not so much real, as a quintessential distillation of reality. Mr. Macey and his companions are left as Nature made them.

Silas Marner finished and given to the world, George

Eliot, though she knew it not, had completed the work which was to constitute her title deed to fame. It was the last of those novels to the making of which she brought all her past experience, all the far-off memories of her childhood days, all those half-forgotten sensations and emotions slowly accumulated over a long period of years and treasured in the inmost chambers of her heart. When she set about writing the *Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss* and last of all, *Silas Marner,* she did not look about—there was no need—for material from this source or that external to herself. There was no need for her to set the cheerful and industrious Lewes to work "foraging" among musty books and records; no need for her to wander far afield in search of facts and local color. All these things were within her. She had but to meditate and the ghosts of old days—people and places—would come from the House of Shadows. The sunlight of summers long gone by would linger in remembered fields and the nightingales would sing again in her heart. And when she is portraying the people whom she knew, talking and acting in the familiar setting in the way she had heard them talk and seen them act there is none that can surpass her.

When she is remembering and not inventing, or at least when she is inventing on a basis of her own genu-

ine experience, she has few rivals among fiction writers and no superiors. Unfortunately, this kind of genre painting is not enough for the average purchaser of fiction, "the short and simple annals of the poor" are not enough to capture and hold his attention. He must have incident, sensation, and so it was necessary for George Eliot to create events for which she had no foundation in her own experience and to force her actors into scenes and crises with which both they and she were unfamiliar. The result is that her remembered characters live and breathe, are clear and convincing in every detail; whereas the characters that she creates or rather invents are shadowy and unreal, are not so much men and women as types, abstractions brought upon the stage to represent certain moral qualities, beings who have as little in common with humanity as the shadowy automata of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

Briefly some of her characters are wrought with consummate finish, are full of warmth and color, others are vague, shadowy and impalpable. It is in vain that we are given to understand that Adam, for example, is a man of unimpeachable integrity, great physical strength and so forth. We never really see his face. But Parson Irwine, Mrs. Poyser, Joshua Rann, we should recognize anywhere.

But from now onward she is to write as it were to a

a theme. She gives herself a subject; she says to herself, given such and such a situation, how would such and such people act? Given, for example, a young and gifted woman who marries a sterile pedant years older than herself, imagining she is in love with him, what will be the result when the scales fall from her eyes and when a younger man, in whom generosity of character is united with youthful ardor and a passionate idealism, makes his entry upon the scene? It may be said that Dorothea (in *Middlemarch*) is George Eliot herself, that Casaubon is based on Herbert Spencer, and Lydgate on Clifford Allbutt. This may be so, but the scenes and events are factitious, and it may be said of them that they are constructed rather than that they take shape, that they are manufactured rather than created. *Romola, Middlemarch, Daniel Deronda* will be dealt with in their turn. Here let it be said that whatever their virtues—and those virtues are undeniable—they belong to a different order and occupy a lower level than those of the great tetralogy which gave the name of George Eliot its peculiar and enduring luster. With *Silas Marner,* the inspiration that shed a grace and glory over the scenes of her childhood and youth comes to an end. Even *Silas Marner* was not written without a struggle. She, who of old had written three whole volumes in six months, now needed a year to bring this, the briefest of her works, to a conclusion.

CHAPTER XVII

SILAS MARNER finished, the shadow of the work, of the project she had formed on their Italian tour rose up before her eyes like a specter, to scare her and to daunt. The old feelings of misgiving and depression which assailed her when one book was finished and another had to be conceived, visited her anew, and oppressed her more deeply than ever. And now for this new book, the old sources of inspiration had run dry. It availed her no longer to look within; the materials must be sought without. There was nothing for it but once more to pack up and set out for Florence; so in the early spring, no sooner than the manuscript of *Silas* had been sent off to Blackwood they start on their journey, in search of the inspiration that shall enable her to bring this vague and inchoate idea to birth and add yet another to her roll of masterpieces.

No sooner had she started than the load was lifted and her high spirits returned—for a while.

"We set off on our second journey to Florence, through France and by the Cornice Road," she records in her Journal. "Our weather was delicious, a little

rain, and we suffered neither from heat nor from dust."

Lewes, good angel and factotum, was there beside her to inspire her with energy and hope, and to chase away the *papillons noirs,* the forebodings which now threatened so often to bring chill and despair to her heart. He is never weary, never downcast, attending to her material wants, "going with me to the Magliabecchian Library and poking about everywhere on my behalf—I having very little self-help about me of the pushing and inquiring kind." For Lewes it is, for many a day, good-by to science, good-by to his old loves, zoology, biology and the rest of it. He must needs lay aside the microscope and resume the second fiddle, which he plays with undiminished skill and unfailing good-humor. But not even he can wholly banish the *frigidus circum præcordia sanguis* which *will* make her spirits flag and her resolution falter. "Will it be all in vain?" she writes in that Journal to which she commits her most secret thoughts. "Alas!" she adds sadly, "I could have done much more if I had been well; but that regret applies to most years of my life."

Of Florence, where they see no one but Mrs. Trollope and her little girl Beatrice, she soon begins to grow weary. The heat and the labors to which she has committed herself begin to tell on her. Nevertheless she climbs to the top of Giotto's tower—"a very sublime

getting up-stairs indeed"—and of an evening, avoiding the slow crowds on the Lung' Arno, they take their way up all manner of streets. And here is a touch—in a letter home to Charles—that brings the whole of Florence, as in a flash, before the inward eye: "We have had glorious sunsets, shedding crimson and golden lights under the dark bridges across the Arno."

At the end of May—they had arrived in Florence on the fourth—they were meditating a return home, when Thomas Adolphus Trollope, who had been away, came back and persuaded them to stay long enough to make the expedition to Camaldoli and La Vernia in his company. This cast a glow—till then rather conspicuously lacking—over the whole visit. "I wish you could have shared," she writes in a letter to Sara Hennell, "the pleasures of our last expedition from Florence—to the Monasteries of Camaldoli and La Vernia. . . . Imagine the Franciscans of La Vernia, which is perched upon an abrupt rock rising sheer on the summit of a mountain, turning out at midnight (and when there is deep snow for their feet to plunge in), and chanting their slow way up to the little chapel perched at a lofty distance above their already lofty monastery! This they do every night throughout the year in all weathers."

They return by way of Lago Maggiore and the St. Gothard, reaching home on the fourteenth of June. The

attentive Blackwood is at hand to receive them. George Eliot had vowed that till her work was finished she would go nowhere, but he tempts her with an invitation to dine with him at Greenwich. She "had a pleasant evening—the sight of a game of golf in the Park and a hazy view of the distant shipping, with the Hospital finely broken by trees in the foreground. . . . The chat was agreeable enough, but the sight of the gliding ships darkening against the dying sunlight made me feel chat rather importunate."

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage!

Two days after her return, she writes these words in her Journal:

"This morning, for the first time, I feel myself quietly settled at home. I am in excellent health, and long to work steadily and effectively. If it were possible that I should produce *better* work than I have yet done! At least there is a possibility that I may make greater efforts against indolence and the despondency that comes from too egoistic a dread of failure." From which it appears that she too, now at the very zenith of her powers and reputation, was haunted by that thing which is at once the sign and the bane of a sensitive nature, an "inferiority complex." It was soon to give fresh evidence

of its activity, that complex, and now in part at least her forebodings were to be justified. Indolence she was indeed, by sheer force of will, sheer stubborn determination, to overcome. She will, by sheer driving power, get through with her historical novel. Somehow or other she will have done with this importunate and recalcitrant Savonarola and give its quietus to the ghost that she had raised. She will write a political novel, and then two more stories of portentous length, and death will come to her with her pen still between her fingers. Truly she will conquer her indolence, but better work than she had yet done, she was not destined to produce.

On June nineteenth she writes thus in her Journal: "This is the last entry I mean to make in my old book in which I wrote for the first time at Geneva in 1849. What moments of despair I passed through after that—despair that life would ever be made precious to me by the consciousness that I had lived to some good purpose! It was the sort of despair that sucked away the sap of half the hours which might have been filled by energetic youthful activity; and the same demon tries to get hold of me again whenever an old work is dismissed and a new one is being meditated."

She must have been anything but easy to live with, with her depression, her headaches, her dyspepsia, her nervous irritability. And now the task she had set her-

self, this historical novel, was to drive her to despair. Her unhappy state is mirrored plainly enough in her Diary. "Read little this morning—my mind dwelling with much depression on the probability or improbability of my achieving the work I wish to do. . . . I am much afflicted with hopelessness and melancholy just now." So she writes on the thirtieth of July. On the first of August she is "struggling constantly with depression." By the twelfth she had "got into a state of so much wretchedness in attempting to concentrate my thoughts on the construction of my story, that I became desperate, and suddenly burst my bonds, saying, I will not think of writing!" This desperate resolve does not seem to have been followed up, and a week later the cloud has lifted a little. "This morning I conceived the plot of my novel with new distinctness." But then again, alas! "These have been placid ineffective days—my mind being clouded and depressed." Truly the little man must have been hard put to it to keep a cheerful mien. He is often ill himself, but he never shows it, never complains. "I think he has had at least five days of sick headache," she writes to Sara Hennell, "but then he is better tempered and more cheerful *with* headache than most people are without it; and in that way he lightens his burthen." Sometimes it is true he will snatch an hour or two and go off with his net to Wimbledon

ponds, for "grist for his microscope"—and for refreshment for his spirit. She will not look *Romola* in the face, she quiets her conscience by taking up some other task, anything to postpone the evil day. She sets herself to revise her books in view of a popular edition. Then they rush off to Malvern to see what a change will do, but there she still looks askance at *Romola,* and devotes herself to correcting the first volume of *Adam Bede.* At Malvern they stay just ten days and are back again in London by the fourteenth of September. But still the clouds hang upon her. "I have been unwell ever since we returned from Malvern," she notes in her Diary, ". . . so that I have scarcely done anything except correct my own books for a new edition." And now and again, like a drowning woman clutching at a straw, she clutches at two or three ideas for an English novel that came into her mind.

But at last, search as she may, there is no further excuse for dallying, the inevitable must be faced, and under date of October seventh we find this entry in her Journal:

"Began the first chapter of my novel 'Romola.' "

But it did not prosper. "Utterly desponding about my book"; "trying to write, trying to construct, and unable"; "so utterly dejected, that in walking with G. in the Park, I almost resolved to give up my Italian novel."

Such are the entries that follow hard on one another in a quick crescendo of despair.

Yet it was not all gloom, not all bitterness and unrequited effort.

. . . quondam cithara tacentem
suscitat Musam neque semper arcum
tendit Apollo.

Sometimes Mr. Spencer would come of an evening with one or two other friends, and they would talk with him "about his chapter on the Direction of Force"; but better even than that impassioned experience was the pleasure derived from a new grand piano. "Last night we had a Beethoven night. We are looking out for a violinist . . . we have our violincello." Then there is that *rus in urbe,* the Zoo whither she goes with the boys. And Lewes' health is promising. He is deep in Aristotle, working "with all the zest that belongs to fresh ideas." Yes, but there was still that terrible *Romola,* and not an inch of progress made; plenty of *travaux d'approche,* an incredible amount of preparatory reading, but of the book itself, not a line. The "spark from Heaven" would not fall. Would it ever fall? She worked herself into a state of panic like that of some one who can not sleep and feels the day coming nearer and nearer. She reads this and she reads that. "Finished the

8th vol. of Lastri . . . read Poggiana. In the afternoon walked to Molini's and brought back Savonarola's 'Dialogus de Veritate Prophetica,' and 'Compendium Revelationum' for £4!" But the time was ebbing with alarming speed and still the first stone of the building had not been laid.

Nox ruit, Ænea. . . .

"The past, that one would like to mend," she writes sadly, "spreads behind one so lengthily, and the years of retrieval keep shrinking—the terrible *peau de chagrin* whose outline narrows and narrows with our ebbing life."

Whatever misgivings George Eliot may have had about *Romola* there were some who did not share her despondency. George Smith offered to buy it outright for ten thousand pounds and to publish it serially in the *Cornhill.* Ultimately, because Smith wanted to begin publishing it in May (it was now February) and George Eliot would not consent to begin publication until she had seen nearly to the end of the work, the proposal fell through. Finally, it was agreed that *Romola* should be published in the *Cornhill* and that she should receive seven thousand pounds in twelve monthly payments. Blackwood, the faithful Blackwood,—who it appears

made no attempt to outbid the enterprising Mr. Smith, —wrote a letter "in the most perfect spirit of gentlemanliness and good feeling." Courteous—and cautious Blackwood!

Meantime there had come heartening news from France. Montalembert praised *Silas Marner* and Alexandre Dumas the elder went off into rhapsodies about *Adam Bede* and pronounced it the first novel of the age. "After this," she says—and no wonder—"I will never guess who will admire or dislike me."

Under the date of January 1, 1862, she makes an entry about Montalembert and *Silas Marner*. It evidently put new heart into her for she adds immediately "I began again my novel of 'Romola,'" which she had already begun in the previous October! Still it made slow progress. So much reading had to be done, *"ad hoc"* reading, which had to be digested so quickly, for there would be no time for lingering by the way. When the monthly instalments were begun they would have to be done up to date. "Detained from writing [she says in her Journal in an entry dated January 26, 1862] by the necessity of gathering particulars: 1st, about Lorenzo de Medici's death; 2nd, about the possible retardation of Easter; 3d, about Corpus Christi day; 4th, about Savonarola's preaching in the Quaresima of 1492. Finished 'La Mandragola'—second time reading

for the sake of Florentine expressions—and began 'La Calandra.'" What a task! "A week of February already gone," she writes despondently. "I have been obliged to be very moderate in work from feebleness of head and body; but I have rewritten, with additions, the first chapter of my book." No wonder—on February eleventh—they "set off to Dorking." They return, and still the intolerable immovable burden is upon her. "Will it ever be finished?" she writes despairingly in her Journal. "Ever be worth anything?" It is unbearable, so away again to Englefield Green, where they spend "a delightful week at the Barley Mow Inn," and then, after a week of the pure air and the notes of the blackbirds, home again to "the usual canopy of smoke and the sound of cab wheels." If the *fumus strepitusque* of the metropolis oppressed her then, what an agony would have tortured her spirit in these strident days. Once again, then, *à la besogne!* and at last there comes an entry in the Journal—April second—that strikes a new and welcome note. "Writing with enjoyment," she says. Alas on April sixteenth we read: "As I have been ailing for a fortnight or more, we resolved to go to Dorking, and set off to-day." Three weeks there of delicious weather and then the lovers—for such they are still—return to "the old accustomed duet this month. We enjoy an interval of our double solitude." More

writing, more struggles—"a dreadful palsy has beset me for the last few days"—and then away again to Littlehampton and thence to the inevitable and indispensable Dorking. And so the struggle goes on; little by little, inch by painful inch, she gains ground.

Was she happy all this time, despite the anxiety and the restlessness of this endless task? In the evenings, by the fireside alone with Lewes and only "the boy," of whom she was really fond, to modify the dual solitude which was so dear to her,—this was her greatest happiness, this and the conversation of a few chosen friends who would drop in of an evening, and, now and again, a concert or two. Yes, she was happy beyond imagining, —if only she could get to an end of that interminable task. Christmas comes and they spend it at home, alone without any guests. "Mr. Lewes," she writes to Sara Hennell, "who talks much less about goodness than I do, but is always readier to do the right thing, thinks it rather wicked for us to eat our turkey and plum-pudding without asking some forlorn person to eat it with us. But I'm afraid we were glad, after all, to find ourselves alone with 'the boy.' "

On Christmas Eve they go to hear the *Messiah* at her Majesty's whereupon she comments: "What pitiable people those are who feel no poetry in Christianity! Surely the acme of poetry hitherto is the conception of

the suffering Messiah and the final triumph, 'He shall reign forever and forever.' " Sara Hennell, to whom she writes this, had sent her a book-marker—how many of the present generation have seen the sort of book-marker which Victorian ladies used to exchange as symbols and tokens of affection and regard?—"If," she says, "my book-marker were just a little longer, I should keep it in my beautiful Bible in large print, which Mr. Lewes bought for me in prevision for my old age. He is not fond of reading the Bible himself, but 'sees no harm' in my reading it."

Toward the end of April, 1863, George Eliot stole away to her beloved Dorking for a fortnight's solitude, while Lewes ran over to Berne to see his two younger sons. On the tenth of May they are home again. The weather was severely cold for several days of her stay and she was often ailing. Hence she was behind with her July number of *Romola,*—the last part but one.

A month later there was "a little party with music" intended to celebrate the completion of *Romola.* But it was not yet absolutely completed. The epilogue did not please her and had to be written over again. At last on June ninth, however, she is able to write in her Journal, "Put the last stroke to 'Romola.' *Ebenezer!*" And that same evening they go to hear *La Gazza Ladra,* and then, away to the Isle of Wight!

The writing of *Romola* marked a crisis in the life of George Eliot. It "ploughed into her more than any other of her books." "I began it," she says, "a young woman—I finished it an old woman." The manuscript she gave to Lewes, with the following words inscribed upon it:

"To the Husband whose perfect love has been the best source of her insight and strength, this manuscript is given by his devoted wife, the writer."

Not Prospero's enchanted island could have wrought greater marvels than the Isle of Wight. The weight, the "leaden weight" is lifted, and peace and happiness and serenity return to her soul. She tasted at last the delicious joys of perfect, well-earned idleness. "This place is perfect," she writes, "reminding me of Jersey, in its combination of luxuriant greenth with the delights of a sandy beach. . . . I am enjoying the hedgerow grasses and flowers, with something like a released prisoner's feeling—it is so long since I had a bit of real English country."

The Leweses are rich now—at least as riches went in those days. It is long since they had to think of writing for dear life. But, for all her wealth and all her renown, we may wonder whether she is happier than in those olden days when the wolf sometimes growled uncomfortably near their door. For one thing they were

alone with each other then, with none to mar those tête-à-têtes always so dear. And then came Charles, an excellent fellow no doubt; but still, with a third party in the house, the old snugness, the old feeling of cozy intimacy was gone. And now the two younger boys, Thornton and Herbert, are nearing the completion of their schooldays at Berne. They will soon be home and something must be found for them to do. Unhappily, Thornton and Herbert do not possess the sort of talents that bring success at examinations. They are good enough boys, both of them, but in tastes and temperament singularly unlike Charles with his fondness for books and music and art. But in this case. . . . Well, at all events she will "do her duty by them." But the responsibility was irksome and worrying. "We are still in a nightmare of uncertainty about our boys. But then I have by my side a dear companion who is a perpetual fountain of courage and cheerfulness, and of considerate tenderness for my lack of those virtues." Evidently things did not always run on with perfect smoothness. "Conceive us, please," she wrote in a letter to Mrs. Peter Taylor, "with three boys at home, all bigger than their father! It is a congestion of youthfulness on our mature brains that disturbs the course of our lives a little and makes us think of most things as good to be deferred till the boys are settled again."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I CAN read with pleasure and edification *Peter Bell,*" said Matthew Arnold in the introduction to his selection of Wordsworth's poems, "and the whole series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets,* and the address to Mr. Williamson's spade, and even the *Thanksgiving Ode;*—everything of Wordsworth, I think, except *Vaudracour and Julia.*" Such it is to be Wordsworthian. Similarly with Scott, who, I believe, is not a popular author with the present generation, there are those—and I am proud to include myself among that small but happy band—who can read "with pleasure and edification" every word that the author of *Waverley* ever wrote, including the introductions and notes. Nevertheless I confess that, much as I love George Eliot, my devotion to her has never enabled me entirely to get through *Romola,* diligently and conscientiously as I have tried. With Scott even when his inspiration is at its lowest, it is somehow pleasant to travel. You feel that you are pacing side by side with a very gallant gentleman and you bear with the prolixity of the narration—nay, you even delight in it—because you love the voice of the narrator and the

look upon his face. At his best he is a magician and transports you into another and an enchanted world. Who cares whether that world be historically exact? It were better to wonder with Scott, than to stump the dull road with Stubbs. And even when the magic fails, it is pleasant to find oneself with such a kindly and courteous companion.

But it is far otherwise with George Eliot. If it was some *not-self* that wrote *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss,* whispering in her heart and guiding her writing hand, that mysterious and miraculous agency withdrew its cooperation when *Romola* came to be written. All the weariness and depression, physical and mental, which weighed on her during the composition of these pages is faithfully reflected in them; all the history and archeology with which she had crammed herself, the topographical details, tags of Italian poetry, bits of contemporary talk (translated in foot-notes for the benefit of the uncultured); all the scraps of information sharked up *ad hoc* in the Magliabecchian Library—there they are, hard and undigested, easily visible amid the torrent of interminable verbiage she compelled herself to disgorge. I do not mean that there are not some beautiful and effective passages. There are. They are like rare gleams of sunshine that race across the fields, chased by the shadows on a cloudy day in March. Such a one for

example occurs in the proem, as she calls it. Feeling that she must begin some time or another and not knowing how, she sets to work on a proem, with the idea of working herself into the proper mood and creating the necessary Florentine atmosphere. It is supposed to be impressive, it essays to be eloquent; it is for the most part nothing but a string of third-rate platitudes uttered in tones of pretentious solemnity. Only toward the end of this portentous exercise comes a passage in which some echoes of the authentic voice fall upon the ear as of old. The Ghost of an old Florentine is supposed to be revisiting the scene of his life upon earth, and marvels how like, amid all its changes, is the city before him to the city he once knew and loved. Florence in spite of all, is Florence still. "The changes," cries the old man's spirit, "have not been so great in those uncounted years. I will go down and hear—I will tread the familiar pavement, and hear once again the speech of Florentines." But he is bidden to stay his steps and not to tempt so rash an experience.

"Go not down, good Spirit! for the changes are great and the speech of Florentines would sound as a riddle in your ears. Or, if you go, mingle with no politicians on the *marmi* or elsewhere; ask no questions about trade in the Calimara; confuse yourself with no inquiries into scholarship, official or monastic. Only look at the sun-

light and shadows on the grand walls that were built solidly and have endured in their grandeur; look at the faces of the little children, making another sunlight amid the shadows of the age; look, if you will, into the churches, and hear the same chants, see the same images as of old—the images of willing anguish for a great end, of beneficent love and ascending glory; see upturned living faces, and lips moving to the old prayers for help. These things have not changed. The sunlight and shadows bring their old beauty and waken the old heart-strains at morning, noon and eventide; the little children are still the symbol of the eternal marriage between love and duty; and men still yearn for the reign of peace and righteousness."

It was, alas, sound advice to enjoin the "good Spirit" not to go down into the city, on the ground that the speech of Florentines would sound as a riddle in his ears. That I am afraid is too true. I think if Florentines spoke in the way George Eliot makes them speak their speech would have sounded as a riddle in anybody's ears. But I can not believe that they unburdened themselves in language so artificial and so tedious. I am convinced—and nothing will persuade me to the contrary—that that same language was manufactured with painstaking precision in the study at 16 Blandford Square. Well, read it and praise it who will! There are, they say,

magnificent passages in it. I fear that is too true. "Take eloquence and wring its neck," was Verlaine's advice. And it was sound. Sir Leslie Stephen says that divested of her Florentine and medieval surroundings and "make-up" Romola was really Maggie. She may be *sed quantum mutata ab illa.* I prefer my Maggie under her English sky and speaking her English speech. Impressions, knowledge, sympathies, affections must have time to get into the blood, to become part of the very fiber of your being; they must be absorbed slowly, gently, insensibly. But George Eliot had fed herself in haste; her conscience and her spirits oppressed by the necessity of a tyrannous engagement which she had to fulfil. So she crammed herself with the feverish and unhappy eagerness of a candidate for a competitive examination.

She fulfilled the task. But at what a cost! It had been like rowing a race from Putney to Mortlake without any previous training. It took her long to get over the strain. She had certainly not wholly recovered from it when she undertook to write *Felix Holt, the Radical.* The scene is England, certainly, and that at least is to the good, but though she draws on one authentic memory—the election riot she had seen as a child at Nuneaton—for one important incident in her story, the whole production is labored and unreal. It smells of the lamp. If I were left quite alone in some remote country inn with bad weath-

er without and nothing to read within but a copy of *Felix Holt* discarded by a previous traveler, I do not think I should—I do not think I *could*—settle down to read it. The seven thousand pounds paid by Smith for *Romola* had not turned out a paying speculation. The circulation of the *Cornhill* had gone down instead of up. Smith, therefore, respectfully declined to give the five thousand pounds she asked for *Felix Holt,* and the book was offered to Blackwood, the ever loyal Blackwood, who paid the money without a murmur.

CHAPTER XIX

For some time past the Leweses had been contemplating a change of house. "An attractive and commodious residence," as the house-agents put it, was in the market. It was Number 21, North Bank, Regent's Park, and was known as the "Priory." Its situation was charming and went no little way to make up to her for the necessity of living in town. Nevertheless they hesitated. "We are," she writes to Mrs. Bray on June 1, 1863, "thinking about the questionable house (The Priory) and wondering what would be the right thing to do; hardly liking to lock up any money in land and bricks, and yet frightened lest we should not get a quiet place just when we want it." The hesitating lasted about a month and ended in their taking the house. "We are really going to buy The Priory after all," she writes on the eleventh of July to Sara Hennell. "You would think it very pretty," she adds, "if you saw it now, with the roses blooming about it." It was a beautiful house, with its gracious surroundings of trees and flowers, its dignified spacious rooms, and her Sunday afternoon receptions there have become a sort of legend in the history of

English letters. Yet notwithstanding all the attractions of this *rus in urbe,* she was for ever yearning for the real country. On every pretext, however slight, she will escape—to Dorking, to Worthing, anywhere—so as to be quit for a time of the gloom and depression which, for all its distractions, London never fails to bring upon her. "The wide sky, the *not* London," she confesses, "makes a new creature of me in half an hour. I wonder then why I am ever depressed—why I am so shaken by agitations. I came back to London, and again the air is full of demons." Yet there is one thing that can touch even London into beauty and that is autumn, which she never ceased to love. "The edge of autumn on the morning air makes even London a place in which one can believe in beauty and delight. Delicate scent of dried rose-leaves and the coming of the autumnal airs are two things that make me feel happy before I know why."

But before the move takes place the two younger boys have to be seen to. Thornton, whom they had thought to put into the Indian Civil Service, had been in for his examination and failed—disastrously. None of the professions called "learned" was, it seems, thought of for them. It would have meant their pursuing their studies at home. This, it appears, would have meant too serious an interference with that quiet tête-à-tête domesticity on which she set so much store. Let them go abroad, and

since India was ruled out, let them go to Africa. It would make men of them, and as for their outfit and the expenses, she was rich now and she would see to it that they wanted for nothing. "Thornie" then is packed off to Natal—soon to be followed by "Bertie." "He went away in excellent spirits, with a large packet of recommendatory letters to all sorts of people, and with what he cares much more for—a first-rate rifle and revolver, —and already with a smattering of Dutch Zulu, picked up from his grammars and dictionaries." So Thornie and Bertie are off her hands. And who could say she had not done her part handsomely. Never did any young colonizers have a better send-off or set out with a more complete equipment. And yet . . . Well, the "little Pater" seemed to have no misgivings, and he, after all, was their own father. Many and many a young fellow, hating an indoor and sedentary occupation, would have jumped at getting such a start in life. Yes, Thornie now, and soon Bertie, would be provided for and in a fashion more permanent than their "parents" imagined. They would not again—not at least for long —be a burden or a distraction to "their people" or trouble those tête-à-têtes which they held so dear.

And now for the new home, and then a little peace and quiet, a spell of *recueillement*. Most normal women enjoy moving into a new house, especially if it be an

improvement on the old, and the arrangement of the furniture and the purchase of new things—carpets, curtains and so forth—is a delight and an excitement to them, however much they may affect to bewail the trouble. Long ago George Eliot had promised herself that her drawing-room should be "a paradise of green." But she had grown older meanwhile. George Eliot was hardly to be accounted a normal, or at least an ordinary woman. We should scarcely expect the ordinary woman to take a passionately absorbing interest in Roman history or to declare that "Mommsen's 'History of Rome' is so fine, that" she counts "all minds graceless who read it without the deepest stirrings." Nor does the ordinary woman begin her day with a plunge into Homer as a sort of intellectual lustration or spiritual ablution. These things were scarcely compatible with an interest in curtains and chair covers. "I long," she notes in her Journal, "to have done thinking of upholstery, and to get again a consciousness that there are better things than that to reconcile one with life." And to Mrs. Bray she pours forth her soul thus: "Such fringing away of precious life, in thinking of carpets and tables, is an affliction to me, and seems like a nightmare from which I shall find it bliss to awake into my old world of care for things quite apart from upholstery." But be it remembered that she had begun *Romola* a young

woman, and finished it an old one. The seven thousand pounds she had got in return was perhaps after all not such a very magnificent recompense for the loss of her youth. But, *Romola* or no *Romola,* the years flow on and sooner or later comes the crisis, which no woman can escape, the climactery, only with George Eliot it seems to have come rather early. But while she is correcting the proofs for a new edition of Lewes' *Goethe* and preparing his *Aristotle* for the press she has a coadjutor, who takes upon himself the burdens and vexations of "the move." "Happily Mr. Owen Jones has undertaken the ornamentation of the drawing-room, and will prescribe all about chairs, etc." That is fortunate—but it may be observed in passing "undertaken the ornamentation" is a "vile phrase" and a too characteristic and hardly less vile one is "prescribe about chairs." One hopes it was not matched by the furniture and "the engravings" about which the eminent Mr. Owen Jones —who clearly looked on his self-imposed task as a labor of love—took such infinite pains, "in order that everything about us may be pretty." The gallant and esthetic Mr. Jones actually "stayed two nights till after twelve o'clock, that he might see every engraving hung in the right place." Nor did his good offices stop at hanging pictures. Not by any means, as we shall see. By reason of the fact that the house-warming was fixed for

Charles' twenty-first birthday, the event became "a doubly interesting epoch." "I wish," she says in a letter to Mrs. Congreve (to whom she writes more "humanly" than to most of her other correspondents), "your sweet presence could have adorned our drawing-room, and made it look still more agreeable in the eyes of all beholders. You would have liked to hear Jansa play on his violin; and you would perhaps have been amused to see an affectionate but dowdy friend of yours, splendid in a grey moire antique—the consequence of a severe lecture from Owen Jones on her general neglect of personal adornment." That was charming of Mr. Owen Jones and one can not but admire his courage in daring to touch upon such frivolous themes with a lady who "was swimming in Comte and Euripides and Latin Christianity." True she had to interrupt these pleasures and to occupy her mind with "old carpets fitted in new places, and new carpets suffering from accidents; chairs, tables, and prices; muslin curtains and down-draughts in cold chimneys." But this was not to endure for ever. She will soon—in a few days indeed—be able to sit and take her ease in the drawing-room whose "ornamentation" had been so kindly "undertaken" by Mr. Owen Jones. "I am," she writes to Madame Bodichon, "doing nothing but indulging myself—enjoying great books, enjoying our new pretty quiet home"—the

"boys," it will be remembered, are far away—"and the study of Beethoven's sonatas for piano and violin, with the mild-faced old Jansa. . . . I sit taking deep draughts of reading—'Politique Positive,' Euripides, Latin Christianity, and so forth, and remaining in glorious ignorance of 'the current literature.' " And then appearing to turn her thoughts to her friend, but, in reality, still thinking of herself, she adds: "I am sorry to think of you without any artistic society to help you and feed your faith. It is hard to believe long together that anything is 'worth while' unless there is some eye to kindle in common with our own, some brief word uttered now and then [she means the mind and the words of George Henry Lewes] to imply that what is infinitely precious to us is precious alike to another mind. I fancy that to do without that guaranty, one must be rather insane—one must be a bad poet, or a spinner of impossible theories, or an inventor of impossible machinery." Well, if Lewes did not save her from being a bad poet, he did a great deal to preserve her from the other excesses. Yet, as she says, "in the most entire confidence even of husband and wife there is always the unspoken residue—the *undivined* residue—perhaps of what is most sinful, perhaps of what is most exalted and unselfish." Was this the inevitable isolation of soul from soul, sundered by

or some other more definite secret of which Lewes was in ignorance?

Their new house, the Priory, has come in a special manner to be associated, in the popular imagination, with George Eliot. It is the shrine toward which the faithful bend their steps. It was here she sat in state and received her worshipers on Sunday afternoons. These *dimanches* became for a time quite the vogue. Most of the notabilities of the day in the literary, artistic and scientific worlds came to pay homage to this woman of genius. It was rather an ordeal, at least for the visitors. If it is the duty of the *salonière* to set her guests at their ease, to reassure the bashful, to encourage the silent, and generally to take care that the ball is kept rolling, then it must be confessed that George Eliot was far from performing her task to perfection. It was, I think, Brillat-Savarin who said that no dinner party should consist of more than twelve; George Eliot, I fancy, would have held that no party at all should number more than six, and it is probable that in her heart she would have deemed even that too many. Vivacious, *spirituelle, insouciante,*—these she certainly was not. The quick riposte, the sparkling epigram, the wit, the laughter, that made the air electrical at Rambouillet or

at Sceaux were seldom in evidence at the Priory, Regent's Park; and it is strange that no hint of the rich and exquisite humor which abounds so gloriously in her three great works—*Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*—putting her, at least in that respect, on an inaccessible pinnacle among women writers, should ever have appeared in her general conversation.

No; George Eliot, it seems, did not regard conversation as a fine art, as something to be cultivated for its own sake, like a game of skill, something without any more serious motive than to charm the passing hour. "The perfume and suppliance of a minute." She took herself and life very seriously. Salons, they say, do not flourish on this side of the Channel. True, Herbert Spencer and Mr. Huxley, admirable persons though they were, were hardly suited to play the part of a Voltaire, we will say, or a Fontenelle or a Saint-Aulaire. Learning there often was in that drawing-room so tastefully arranged by "our dear good friend Mr. Owen Jones," too much of it indeed, but the vain and perishable graces which bloom with such rich rare charm and lightness on the banks of the Seine, would never have flourished at all at the Priory, had it not been for George Henry Lewes. In his neighborhood, dulness, pretentiousness, heaviness could not exist an instant. While the mistress of the house, "with her commanding

brows and deep penetrating eyes," was holding converse "in sweet, restrained impressive speech" with some awed and uneasy worshiper, Lewes, a veritable Ariel, would be passing from group to group, dropping a *mot* here, or a good story there, always good-humored, kindly, witty, charming forth smiles and laughter wherever he went. Laughter is a divine gift and distinguishes us from the brute creation. It were impious not to indulge it. "George Lewes," says Sir Leslie Stephen, in an admirable chapter, "was unquenchable . . . and while more serious interviews were taking place at the centre of the circle, there would be a little knot on the periphery which was a focus of laughter and good-humoured fun." Not in the least that he was flippant where George Eliot was concerned—far from that. If he had a divinity—and "whistle or the lave o't" summed up the philosophy of the intrepid soldier of fortune—that divinity was George Eliot. "Nobody," says Sir Leslie Stephen again, "could watch Lewes [at these receptions] without being struck by the cordial and generous devotion of a man not too much given to an excess of veneration."

And the great lady herself, as she sat enthroned in her low armchair to the left of the fire, her wealth of auburn hair (which she had once had shaved off to satisfy the curiosity of the phrenological Mr. Bray) now

streaked with gray and concealed by the folds of a lace mantilla caught up into a point above the forehead, conversing in her "low and very musical" voice with one or perhaps two deferential and perhaps awestricken guests, her expressive blue gray eyes, her delicate hands —it required some imagination to see in her the wayward petulant little wench who had been wont to reap vicarious vengeance on her battered doll in that lonely attic at Griff or insensibly to store up in her receptive little brain those sights and sounds and scents of her beloved countryside and so to commit her memories to paper that they bloom for us to this day with a freshness undimmed by time. She has left those dreams of the past now, on that theme she tells herself all her songs are sung, no more is there to say. She will seek elsewhere, in the world about her, in the play of interests, the clash of ambitions, in social life, in the conversation of the brilliant and the learned, for some new inspiration. She will essay a higher flight, will spread a more ambitious pinion. A poem, a drama, a novel—there is plenty of material to her hand, and meantime there is no hurry. And so, with no more exercise of the pen than is necessary to keep her hand in—an occasional article in the *Pall Mall,* or the *Fortnightly,* that new departure in literary journalism of which her husband is the editor—she will enjoy a little space of well-earned but by no means vacant repose.

She was to essay a higher flight—but not to achieve it. None of the things that were to come, not *Felix Holt,* not *The Spanish Gypsy* nor *Daniel Deronda,* not even *Middlemarch,* was destined to add to her fame or to impart any additional radiance to the aureole that already encompassed her. It was not George Eliot conversing with Browning, Spencer, Huxley, Bagehot, Frederic Harrison and all the rest of the mid-Victorian giants, but the little wench driving along in the gig between her father's knees that was to endure and to bring enchantment into the minds of the generations to come. She was to perform prodigies of labor in the years that remained to her, to display, sometimes at least triumphantly, the breadth and depth of her great intellectual powers, but the sunshine, the scent of the woods and fields are not in this later work; the light has died away from the landscape; the poet, the child in her is silent.

Despite the amenities of her surroundings, despite the consideration, the homage of which she was the recipient, town life weighed ever more and more heavily upon her. It would have been unendurable save for continual "escapes" now to Scotland, now to Italy, now for a few days to Harrogate and Scarborough, now to Normandy and Brittany. This latter expedition took them a month and in that month they went from Boulogne to Saint-Valery, on to Dieppe, Rouen, Caen, Ba-

yeux, Saint-Lo, Vire, Avranches, Dol, Saint-Malo, Rennes, Avray and Carnac and back by Nantes, Tours, Le Mans, Chartres, Paris, Rouen, Dieppe, Abbeville, and so again to Boulogne. "Our travelling in Brittany was a good deal marred and obstructed by the Emperor's *fête,* which sent all the world on our track towards Cherbourg and Brest. But the Norman churches, the great cathedrals at Le Mans, Tours and Chartres, with their marvellous painted glass, were worth much scrambling to see." It was sunshine and the clear sparkling air of the sea or the country for which she craved with an insatiable longing. "I often imagine you, not without a little longing [she writes to Sara Hennell], turning out into the fields whenever you list, as we used to do in the old days at Rosehill. That power of turning out into the field is a great possession in life—worth many luxuries." Again and again she harps on this theme. She was acutely, almost morbidly sensitive to weather conditions, and fog depressed her into the very ground. "It was pleasant to have news of you through the fog, which reduces my faith in all good and lovely things to its lowest ebb," she writes to Mrs. Peter Taylor. "I hope," she goes on, "you are less abjectly under the control of the skiey influences than I am. The soul's calm sunshine in me is half made up of the outer sunshine." But she does not despair. Pale and feeble may

be the rays that the March sun casts upon the Priory and its pleasaunces—no matter, there is music to be heard in London and *Judas Maccabæus* shall atone for the lack of ultra-violet rays. "Händel's music," she says, "always brings me a revival." But alas, not for long. "Fog, east wind, and headache:" she writes mournfully; "there is my week's history. . . . I wish an immortal drama could be got out of *my* sorrows"—she had been reading the sorrows of the aged Hecuba "with great enjoyment"—"that people might be the better for them two thousand years hence. But fog, east wind, and headache are not great dramatic motives." Nevertheless the wise and gentle Lewes knew well enough the prescription that was needed to restore her. The conversation of Mr. Huxley and Mr. Spencer could not work the miracle, admirable and instructive though it was, nor could going "to the Crystal Palace to see Garibaldi" bring about the longed-for exhilaration, nor even an exhibition of Mulready's pictures, but, as Lewes told her, the country air "had a magical effect on her, even in the first hour." She adds, "It is not the air alone. It is the wide sky and the hills and the wild flowers which are linked with all calming thoughts, just as every object in town has its perturbing associations."

And so the weeks and months pass on. A little while at home, some stiff reading—heavens, how she read!

(Mill's *Political Economy,* Comte's *Social Science,* Aristotle's *Poetics,* Shakespeare's *King John,* Neal's *History of the Puritans,* Fawcett's *Economic Condition of the Working Classes,* Mill's *Liberty,* Blackstone, Hallam's *Middle Ages* and—the Bible!—these are but a selection; some "energetic" playing on the new grand piano, lessons in accompanying the violin from Herr Jansa (one of the old Beethoven quartet players) and then, pack up the trunks and away again! "Poor George's delicate health" gives her much anxiety. "He grows thinner and thinner"—and no wonder! "He is going to try what horseback will do and I am looking forward to that with some hope." Perhaps poor George might have found some quiet days with his microscope and a visit or two with his net to Wimbledon ponds even more efficacious.

Meantime Charles has "become engaged," an event which George Eliot views with "one auspicious and one dropping eye," for she really loved Charles. But his attraction to Hampstead, where lived the lady of his choice, "gives George and me more of our dear old *tête-à-tête,* which we can't help being glad to recover." The flame still burned with undiminished brightness.

It was in June, 1863, that *Romola* was brought to birth after "unspeakable pains" and "agonising la-

bour." On September sixth occurs the following entry in her Journal. "I am reading about Spain, and trying a drama on a subject that has fascinated me—have written the prologue and am beginning the First Act. But I have little hope of making anything satisfactory." The first hint of *The Spanish Gypsy*. Spain is in the air, it seems, at the Priory. Lewes rubs up his Spanish by reading *Don Quixote*. George Eliot has "a fit of Spanish history and gets up the grammar." And so to the drama. Act I, and then—a month later—Act II are read to George who praises and encourages. Then suddenly comes the inevitable setback. "At a very low ebb, body and mind . . . sticking in the mud continually in the construction of my 3d, 4th, and 5th Acts." Then comes an improvement. "I read the Third Act of my drama to George who praised it highly." All is well again. That was on Christmas Day. On January 1, 1865, she says in her Journal: "I have written three Acts of my drama, and am now in a condition of body and mind to make me hope for better things in the coming year." And then she adds with a portentous preter-Wordsworthian solemnity: "The last quarter has made an epoch for me by the fact that, for the first time in my serious authorship, I have written verse." And then a tribute to "my dear husband for his perfect love, which helps me in all good and checks me in all evil—more conscious

that in him I have the greatest of blessings." The verse-writing habit grows on her for now come two more of "my poems" quite unconnected with *The Gypsy*—one *My Vegetarian Friend,* and one on Utopias. Alas, on the twenty-first of February she is once more "ill and very miserable" and the excellent and ever solicitous George kindly but firmly takes her drama away from her. And then a few weeks later she begins a new novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical,* and—the unreadable. She writes it in a state of almost continuous depression. It involves a point of law, and Frederic Harrison is called in to pronounce on some legal technicalities. He seems to have waded through the whole book. She writes to thank him in an incredibly heavy-handed manner. "It seems to me that you have fitted my phenomena with a *rationale* quite beautifully. [What a phrase!] If there is any one who could have done it better, I am sure I know of no man who *would.*"—Which sounds more elaborate than felicitous. Again she is longing for an escape. Six weeks—the thing ought to be finished in six weeks. After which, away again, out of this London; it doesn't matter whither. Meanwhile the book goes on "growing slowly like a sickly child." At last, on the thirty-first of May *Felix Holt* was finished. Days and nights of throbbing and palpitation—and then, as soon as the last word was written, completely well, a new

woman. Just the time to pack and then to Holland, from Antwerp to Rotterdam, The Hague, Leyden, Amsterdam, Cologne, up the Rhine to Coblentz, thence to Schwalbach a "Paradise," said Lewes, undisturbed in spite of sinister predictions that the railways would be broken up by the Prussian aggressors. As it was, they saw only a handful of soldiers there, and they engaged in nothing more martial than beer-drinking at the Brunnen. From Schwalbach they went to Schlangenbad which they left only just in time to get down the Rhine to Bonn on a Dutch steamer. From Bonn to Aix and then to "dear old Liége" where they had been together thirteen years before. Thence to Chaudfontaine, Louvain, Ghent and Bruges, eventually to Ostend where they wait for a calm sea and finally embark on a very rough one. The times were serious and pulsating with big events, and between war and cholera she confesses that they felt their position as health- and pleasure-seekers somewhat contemptible. At Antwerp they see, one Sunday evening the Ober-Ammergau company representing the *Lebensgeschichte* of our Savior Christ at the Théâtre des Variétés. "The Christ was, without exaggeration, beautiful," and Lewes, "keenly alive to everything stagey," thought so too and was much moved.

CHAPTER XX

HOME once more, in the well-ordered quiet of the Priory the idea of her *Gypsy* steals again into her mind. "I have taken up the idea of my drama, 'The Spanish Gypsy' again"—so she writes in her Journal—"and am reading on Spanish subjects—Bouterwek, Sismondi, Depping, Llorente etc." There should at least be no lack of documentation. A little later she is deploring the difficulty of working out the dramatic action for oneself, under the inspiration of an idea, instead of having a grand myth or an Italian novel ready to one's hand. "I think I have the right *locus* and historic conditions," she says, "but much else is wanting." The scenery was there, the stage was set, the costumes all historically correct, but the actors—where were they? To one incident which she records about this time it is interesting to refer, as indicating a thoroughly Wordsworthian inability in her to distinguish between the good and the less good in her work. Old Sir Henry Holland came one Sunday afternoon to bid her good-by before going on an excursion to North America and told her that he had just been reading *Adam Bede* for the fourth time. "I often read

in it, you know, besides," said the old man, "but this is the fourth time quite through." She was pleased, but adds, "I, of course, with a mother's egoism on behalf of the youngest born, was jealous for 'Felix' "!

But neither *Adam Bede* nor any other, not even the poor and *chétif* Felix, was her real interest now. The fair Fedalma, her beautiful and tragic Gypsy, was her sole and absorbing concern. But somehow she does not seem to thrive in the neighborhood of Regent's Park, nor does Tunbridge Wells (whither they went for a week of fresh air and encountered three whole days of persistent rain) suit this warm beauty of the South. As for the poet herself, she is resigned rather than hopeful. "No;" she writes to Sara Hennell, "I don't feel as if my faculties were failing me. On the contrary, I enjoy all subjects—all study—more than I ever did in my life before. But that very fact makes me more in need of resignation to the certain approach of age and death." That is not a very cheerful note and augurs ill for this poetic enterprise. Whither has fled the visionary glow, the old eagerness,

> Why does the summer not begin,
> Why does my heart not haste?

A grayness had fallen upon her path; the sun refused to shine. Well, then, she herself would hasten away to

the land of the sun, to Spain with its orange groves and spicy airs, its vineyards and flowers, dark-eyed beauties, moonlight serenades, guitars and stately dances, all the pictures vague and various and full of color that spring miraculously into being when you murmur to yourself such a fragrant sun-drenched name as Seville or Valladolid. But they are in no particular hurry. In Paris they stay three days and dine on the first of them, a Saturday, with Madame Mohl and meet Edmond Scherer, Jules Simon, Lomenie, Lavergne and other notabilities. Edmond Scherer, the successor—*sed longo intervallo*—to Saint Beuve in literary criticism, once a shining light of Protestantism, had like George Eliot lost his faith. It was therefore with some feelings of understanding and sympathy that he soon afterward wrote an article in high praise of the great English novelist.

George Eliot and Lewes are persuaded to stay over the following Monday by Madame Mohl who promised to invite Renan to meet them at breakfast. Renan looked like something between a Catholic priest and a dissenting minister. His manners were amiable, his talk was "pleasant" but not "distinguished." Renan wrote one thing that will never die, not a "work" but a labor of love, and that was not his *Vie de Jésus,* or his contributions to *History and Philology* but his *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse.* Did he recognize in the eminent

novelist or she in the renowned historian, a kindred spirit, or suspect that what would preserve both their names from oblivion would be the memories of their childhood, hers enshrined in two novels, his in a single small volume? No, she did not recognize, in the undistinguished conversation of this undistinguished-looking man one of the greatest magicians of the pen, one who by the inherent grace and charm of his writing was to add yet another jewel to the literary diadem of France. If any one can read the dedication to the *Vie de Jésus,* or the opening paragraph of the *Souvenirs* without a tremor of the heart that brings tears to the eyes—tears half of sadness, half of joy, at the contemplation of something wrought with a perfection that is not of this world—I do not envy him his sang-froid. The author of the *Souvenirs* and the author of *The Mill on the Floss* had more in common than they realized over Madame Mohl's breakfast table that morning in Paris. *"J'ai eu le bonheur de connaître la vertu absolue;"* says Renan, *"je sais ce que c'est que la foi, et, bien que plus tard j'ai reconnu qu'une grande part d'ironie a été cachée par le séducteur suprême dans nos plus saintes illusions, j'ai garde de ce vieux temps de précieuses expériences. Au fond, je sens que ma vie est toujours gouvernée par une foi que je n'ai plus."*

From Paris, they travel southward to Bordeaux and

thence to Biarritz. The sight of the ocean there makes upon George Eliot a profound impression. She speaks of its natural beauties as "transcendent." "We agreed," she writes, "that the sea never seemed so magnificent to us before, though we have seen the Atlantic breaking on the rocks at Ilfracombe and on the great granite walls of the Scilly Isles. In the southern division of the bay we see the sun set over the Pyrenees; and in the northern we have two splendid stretches of sand, one with huge fragments of dark rock scattered about for the waves to leap over, the other an unbroken level, firm to the feet, where the hindmost line of waves sends up its spray on the horizon like a suddenly rising cloud." The wide sky and the large air and the solitude were a glorious antidote to the claustrophobia which oppressed her in London.

After breakfast they read Comte together, the *Politique*. "That morning study keeps me in a state of enthusiasm through the day—a moral glow, which is a sort of *milieu subjectif* for the sublime sea and sky." From Biarritz they pass on to San Sebastian thence to Saragossa, Lerida and Barcelona, Alicante, Malaga, Cordova, Seville and Madrid. The very names breathe poetry and romance. Life is "a succession of delights." She grows dithyrambic over Granada: "To stand on one of the towers of the Alhambra and see the sun set be-

hind the dark mountains of Loja, and send its afterglow on the white summits of the Sierra Nevada, while the lovely Vega spreads below, ready to yield all things pleasant to the eye and good for food, is worth a very long, long journey." But all things have an end and at last, on the sixteenth of March—they had started two days after Christmas—they are home again. "I go to my poem," she notes in her Journal, "and the construction of two prose works—if possible."

But there is a heartening communication from Blackwood—a check for two thousand one hundred sixty-six pounds thirteen shillings fourpence. A month or so later she reads her poem, or fifty-six pages of it, to Blackwood who "showed great delight." A fortnight's interlude in the Isle of Wight and then another "flight," this time to North Germany and chiefly to Dresden. They started on July twenty-ninth and were home again by October first. And then occurred a little incident, a tiny event so seemingly insignificant as to seem hardly worth noticing. Only in retrospect, only in looking back on it from the *point de mire* of after years we recognize it as a landmark, a turning point.

Soon after the return from Germany, Lewes and his old friend, Herbert Spencer, decide on having a little walking tour together in Surrey; so, leaving the studious George Eliot busy with her *Gypsy* and deep in Pres-

cott's *Ferdinand and Isabella* with Homer to vary the fare, they start off on their pilgrimage. One day, as they were walking through Weybridge they happened to be passing rather an attractive-looking house, when Spencer exclaimed, "I know the people who live there, old friends of mine and very charming; let us go in and call, I am sure we shall be welcome." They were. "Mr. Lewes," says Mr. J. W. Cross, "with his wonderful social powers charmed all, and they passed a delightful evening."

The Crosses who were destined to play so large a part in the remainder of George Eliot's life, were an admirable example of an English "upper middle-class" family. Cultured, *comme il faut* and comfortably off. The discipline, at once rigid and gentle which reigned in this house at Weybridge, the well-ordered, dignified mode of life, the respect for the *convenances,* and their loyalty to family ties and obligations, would probably have led them to regard with disapproval the irregularity which marked the union of Lewes and his illustrious companion. But strict and conventional though they were and instinctively disinclined—perhaps as a matter of taste rather than of morals—to avoid contact with any who would flout the sacrosanct traditions of life and conduct, they were not narrow-minded, and what in this case was more important, they had a great love of lit-

erature. George Eliot had a great name, they had read and delighted in her books, they could not have failed to be moved by the grave and restrained melancholy with which all her writings were invested. When therefore Lewes extended to them an invitation to visit George Eliot at the Priory, they accepted, went and were charmed. Her sufferings, the travail of the spirit, her constitutional melancholy united to redeem her from all trace of the vulgarity, the egoism that is too often the concomitant of success, even of literary success. They found her simple, sweet and dignified; distinguished, but without a trace of pretentiousness, gracious, yet without a hint of condescension. She, on her side, was no less delighted as well she might be. The words "refinement" and "refined" have been unhappily debased in these days, have come to denote, as it were, a veneer of literary or artistic culture or an outward garment designed to suggest the possession of tastes and accomplishment to which the person who assumes it can not legitimately lay claim, an external adornment put on to disguise an inward vulgarity so that, now, to say a person is refined is almost to say that he is a parvenu. Every language is rich in such examples of the debasement of its coinage; English perhaps particularly so. But in George Eliot's day the word refinement denoted a very definite and desirable thing, and in this

shining and untarnished sense of the word, the Misses Cross were indeed refined; in other words they were endowed with that grace both of mind and demeanor, that harmony between the inner spirit and its outward expression, which we call manner, and which makes the possessors of it, "ladies" or "gentlemen";—two more words which, like the qualities they connote, have latterly fallen into desuetude.

One of these ladies I myself was destined to meet many years after. The headmaster of the school at which I served a hard—and unwilling—apprenticeship to Learning, was Henry Weston Eve of whom it may be said that he was, in very truth, "a scholar and a gentleman." Whether he is to be ranked among the greatest headmasters I know not; but he was certainly among the most winning, exhibiting in all his discourse, the sort of exquisite urbanity that suggests a Newman or a Fenelon and seems a thing almost too delicate for contact with this rough-and-tumble world. I owe him a debt I can never repay. With love and reverence I salute his Shade. Pretty late on in life he married. Hitherto when, as sometimes happened, he asked some of his Sixth Form boys to dinner it had been his sister (a woman of strong character and robust appearance interested in public works) who did the honors. This lady was, I think, less formidable than she appeared. Anyhow we got used to her and she to us. When after the mar-

riage two or three of us were asked to dinner we went, timid and embarrassed pioneers, wondering what was in store for us. What was in store for us was a vision of womanly grace and charm, for our new hostess, though she could have been no longer young, gave us the impression of youthfulness and put us at our ease. I seem to remember that she was dressed in a flowing gown of some dark indeterminate hue, and that she was pale and rather thin, but what I certainly do remember was the whiteness and delicacy of her hands as they strayed over the keys of the piano after dinner when we went up-stairs to the drawing-room "to have a little music."

The lady who wrought this charm, and left upon my adolescent mind this vague but indelible impression, had been before her marriage Miss Florence Cross, the sister-in-law of George Eliot. Cross's *Life* contains a letter to her from George Eliot dated from Italy, one of the letters—and there are not too many of them—which are entirely unforced and natural. Too often, even in her familiar correspondence, we get the impression that it is the eminent novelist rather than the woman, the friend, who is writing. She could rarely divest herself of her writing robes.

At last, on April 29, 1868, not without many escapes to seaside or country, *The Spanish Gypsy* was brought to a conclusion.

"Yes, I am at rest now," George Eliot writes to Mrs. Bray. "My chief excitement and pleasure in the work are over; for when I have once written anything and it is gone out of my power, I think of it as little as possible. Next to the doing of the thing, of course, Mr. Lewes's delight in it is the cream of all sympathy. . . . I can not help asking you to admire what my husband is, compared with many possible husbands—I mean, in urging me to produce a poem rather than anything in a worldly sense more profitable."

And now, *The Spanish Gypsy* being off her hands, farewell once more to the Priory. Two months they spend, constantly "on the move"—Tournay, Liége, Bonn, Frankfort, Baden, then Petersthal, Freiburg, St. Märgen, Basle, Thun and Interlaken, thence via Neuchatel and Dijon to Paris and so home. She took a special delight in St. Märgen of which she sends John Blackwood a charming description, from "among the peaceful mountain-tops." After ascending gradually (in a carriage) for nearly four hours, "we found ourselves," she says, "in a region of grass, corn, and pine woods, so beautifully varied that we seem to be walking in a great park laid out for our special delight. The monks as usual found out the friendly solitude, and this place of St. Märgen was originally nothing but an Augustinian monastery. About three miles off is another place of

like origin, called St. Peter's, formerly a Benedictine monastery, and still used as a place of preparation for the Catholic priesthood. The monks have all vanished, but the people are devout Catholics. At every half-mile by the roadside is a carefully kept crucifix; and last night, as we were having our supper in the common room of the inn, we suddenly heard sounds that seemed to me like those of an accordion. 'Is that a zither?' said Mr. Lewes to the German lady by his side. 'No—it is prayer.' The servants, by themselves—the host and hostess were in the same room with us—were saying their evening prayers, men's and women's voices blending in unusually correct harmony. The same loud prayer is heard at morning, noon, and evening, from the shepherds and workers in the fields."

For once, at all events, the "perturbed spirit" was at rest. "We are increasingly happy," she writes to her old friend Monsieur D'Albert, "although the years carry away with them some of our strength and buoyancy. Our life is absolutely untroubled, and I grow much more cheerful as I grow older. We have good news (although too rarely) from our exiled boys in Africa; and Charlie's lot is altogether satisfactory to us." *The Spanish Gypsy* too was "a great source of added happiness . . . because it has been a deeper joy to Mr. Lewes than any work I have done before. I seem to have

gained a new organ, a new medium that my nature had languished for." Splendid Mr. Lewes! But if it had been back in the old hard, bread-winning days, what then? But now, a fig for money and such mundane considerations. We are now independent of such things—an expensive house in London, servants, a carriage, prolonged and costly continental tours. No wonder "Mr. Lewes [happy man!] plunges at his will into the least lucrative of studies, while I, on my side, follow tastes not much in keeping with these of our noisy, hurrying, ostentatious times." Noisy, hurrying *ostentatious!* This, be it remembered, was in the year 1868, the thirty-first of good Victoria's reign. Crinolines had not yet grown out of fashion. Palmerston had been dead only three years and Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone had begun their diverting game of parliamentary seesaw. True the Reform Bill of 'sixty-seven and the extension of the borough franchise must have created a great deal of noise to say nothing of the disestablishment of the Irish Church which came the next year. But now in this year of grace when peaceful citizens are being slaughtered on the public highway to the tune of nearly twenty a day by motor-cars traveling fifty or sixty miles an hour, and when the air is rent from morn to dewy eve by the roar of aeroplanes, one may be forgiven for looking back not without a sigh, on those noisy hurrying days

when a steam-roller traveling at perhaps two miles an hour had to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag. How remote, and how peaceful it all seems! If George Eliot found those days noisy and hurrying, what would she have called these!

A month or two is spent at home; then, as a sort of interlude, comes a visit to Yorkshire. At Leeds they are entertained for two days by Dr. Clifford Allbutt "a good, clever, graceful man," who shows them "the fine hospital, which, he says, is admirably fitted for its purpose." This eminent person was destined to appear in due course as Lydgate in *Middlemarch*. Doctor Bridges dined with them one day and there was "a great deal of delightful chat." They inspected the "miraculous iron-works" at Sheffield. Then, turning aside to beautiful Matlock, she "found again the spots, the turns of road, the rows of stone cottages, the rushing river Derwent, and the Arkwright mills," among which she drove with her father when she was in her teens.

The year draws to a close, and she makes, on the last day of it, her usual retrospective entry. She speaks of the year now over as having been "as rich in blessings as any preceding year of our double life." She speaks, also, of her happiness "in George's interest in his psychological inquiries" and adds: "We have made some new friendships that cheer us with the sense of new

admiration of actual beings whom we know in the flesh, and who are kindly disposed towards us." This means, chiefly at least, the Cross family. But as yet she had not met J. W. Cross. That event, which was being arranged by that arch-stage-manager, Chance, was not to be much longer delayed.

CHAPTER XXI

GEORGE ELIOT'S Journal for 1869 opens significantly. "I have set myself many tasks for the year—I wonder how many will be accomplished?—a novel called 'Middlemarch,' a long poem on Timoleon, and several minor poems." Clearly the novel, if not the poem, would have to be prepared for by a tour—no mere flying visit to the coast or the country—but a long unhurried tour, to the continent. So George must once more tear himself away from his microscope, his physiological studies and his psychological inquiries and "buckle-to." On the third of March they set out—for the fourth time—to Italy, *via* France and the Cornice. It was in the course of this journey that George Eliot first met her future husband. "I have a very vivid recollection," says Mr. J. W. Cross, "of George Eliot sitting on a sofa with my mother by her side, entirely engrossed with her. Mr. Lewes entertained my sister and me on the other side of the room. But I was very anxious to hear also the conversation on the sofa, as I was better acquainted with George Eliot's books than with any other literature. And through the dimness of these fifteen years, and all that

has happened in them, I still seem to hear, as I first heard them, the low, earnest, deep musical tones of her voice: I still seem to see the fine brows, with the abundant auburn-brown hair framing them, the long head broadening at the back, the grey-blue eyes constantly changing in expression, but always with a very loving, almost deprecating, look at my mother, the finely-formed, thin, transparent hands and a whole *Wesen,* that seemed in complete harmony with everything one expected to find in the author of 'Romola.' The next day, Mr. and Mrs. Lewes went on to Assisi and we to Naples and we did not meet again till the following August at Weybridge."

But now a blow and a heavy one awaited them. It was nearly six years since Thornton Lewes had set out full of hopes to try his fortune as a cattle farmer in Natal, whither his brother Herbert had followed him. For a time all went well: sanguine hopes, solid achievement. And then there came to George Eliot and Lewes while they were away the news that Thornton was ill and was returning home. They reckoned up the possibilities of the situation. It would be six weeks before he could start and then there was the voyage. They need not hurry. They would be back in abundant time to receive him. Their calculations were at fault. Three days after they reached the Priory, Thornie arrived. As

they looked at him worn and wasted by suffering they knew it was his last home-coming. "Since he arrived," she writes to her friend Mrs. Congreve, "our lives have been chiefly absorbed by cares for him; and though we now have a nurse to attend on him constantly, we spend several hours of the day by his side. There is joy in the midst of our trouble, from the tenderness towards the sufferer being altogether unchecked by anything unlovable in him. Thornie's disposition seems to have become sweeter than ever with the added six years."

In August he seemed to revive—"Thornie has been much more lively, with more regular appetite and quieter nights"—and George Eliot and Lewes paid a brief visit to Weybridge. The visit marks a significant stage in George Eliot's life. "There," writes J. W. Cross, "my own first intimacy with George Eliot began, and the bonds with my family were knitted very much closer." Cross's married sister and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Bullock, were staying there at the time—George Eliot and Lewes had met them in Rome some months earlier—just after their marriage. Mrs. Bullock, who had some gift for music, had set one or two of the songs from *The Spanish Gypsy*. She sat down at the piano and sang one of them:

> On through the pines!
> The pillared woods, . . .

George Eliot was deeply affected. No sooner had the last notes died away than she moved quickly to the piano and kissed the singer warmly in her tears. The atmosphere was charged with emotion. It was as though some mysterious unseen presence had passed them by and brushed them lightly with his wing, filling them with a vague, half-apprehensive prescience of things to come. "A day," says Cross, "did the work of years. Our visitors had come to the house as acquaintances, they left it as lifelong friends." Within a month from that day, Cross's sister had died in childbirth, another month and Thornton Lewes' long struggle with death was over at last. "This death," wrote George Eliot in her Journal, "seems to me the beginning of our own." But there was one influence which never failed to bring back serenity to her heart and mind, and that was the calm and silence of the country. "The day after our dear boy's funeral, we went into the quietest and most beautiful part of Surrey, four miles and a half from any railway station. I was very much shaken in mind and body, and nothing but the deep calm of fields and woods would have had a beneficent effect on me."

Poor Thornie! We may wonder what thoughts were his as he lay silent and still on his bed in that dignified, well ordered room at the Priory, waiting for the Shad-

ow to come and gather him within the folds of its sable robe, listening to the faint monotonous ticking of the clock. From time to time he turns his eyes wearily on a figure seated yonder beneath the window reading, and no sound save at intervals a faint rustle as the reader turns a page of her book. The light shines from the window down on the masses of rich auburn hair that makes an aureole about her pale, strongly marked features. The nurse is out for a few hours and George Eliot has come to take her place—George Eliot who has never failed, and never will fail—to do her duty. The young man suffers his gaze to rest languidly on this silent seated figure. Long ago he had learned to call her mother. But did he remember the mother who had borne him, and she, by whatever shore she was tarrying, did she remember him?

George Eliot had nothing to reproach herself with regarding this lad. She had done all and more than all that could be expected of her. She had been everything a mother could be to him—except a mother. And now from the minor duty of soothing this young man's dying pillow and of seeing him, not without tears, decently laid in the ground, she turns to the major duty the name of which was *Middlemarch.* From time to time we hear mention of this task. Not that she was pregnant with it. By no means. It was not to issue from

her, a natural birth, like the creations of the pre-*Romola* period. *Middlemarch* was to be constructed, pieced together bit by bit, patiently, laboriously. It is her duty, a duty she owes to herself, to her reputation. The British public, the world, posterity,—all should see the sort of person *à qui ils avaient affaire!* She had read enormously, voraciously. She devoured more books in a year than many people get through in a lifetime. And how varied, how miscellaneous was her reading! Yes, her readers should have evidence not only of the powers of her mind, but of the richness of its furniture. *Middlemarch* was, as we have said, no natural born child, born because its mother's time was come; it was not even a statue, carved out of the rough which might be taken for, nay might miraculously become, a living being. It was rather a piece of mosaic with patches here and there rich in color and noble in design, but fragmentary, often confused with spaces of gray and drab between these islets of glowing color. And with all its faults, with all its shortcomings, what a magnificent piece of work! What other woman writer, before or since, produced a work of such *envergure.* It is everything that industry united to talent could make of it; but it was not a work of genius. George Eliot had genius, or rather she had had it and now it had departed and what was left was—talent.

It is perhaps rare to find talent and genius coexisting in the same person; normally, when genius ceases to guide the pen, the result is either nothing at all, or just dulness. But George Eliot is seldom merely dull. Not *Felix Holt,* not even *Theophrastus.* Such are uniformly and invariably dull. There are oases in the desert of aridity.

The chief Victorian critics—I do not say the Victorian public but the Victorian critics—looked on *Middlemarch* as her masterpiece. The judgment of the critics was warped by the exaggerated estimation in which they held the exponents of Science and Philosophy. Spencer, Huxley, Tyndall, these men and their school the smaller intellectual fry looked upon with gaping reverence. But in this case, as in most others, *securus judicat orbis terrarum,* the judgment of the public was the true one, and *Middlemarch* is rightly relegated to a lower plane, and if George Eliot survives amid the bewildering torrent of "masterpieces" that pours from the printing press to-day, she owes her immortality to *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss.*

Middlemarch, says Sir Leslie Stephen in an analysis which is itself almost a masterpiece, "shows George Eliot's reflective powers fully ripened and manifesting singular insight into certain intricacies of motive and character." But he adds, "there is . . . a correlative loss of

the early power of attractiveness." And this is how the same critic sums up his final verdict, a verdict from whose general conclusions few will be found to dissent: "*Middlemarch* seems to fall short of the great masterpieces which imply a closer contact with the world of realities and less preoccupation with certain speculative doctrines. Yet it is clearly a work of extraordinary power, full of subtle and accurate observation; and gives, if a melancholy, yet an undeniably truthful portraiture of the impression made by the society of the time upon one of the keenest observers, though upon an observer looking at the world from a certain distance, and rather too much impressed by the importance of philosophers and theorists."

The character of Dorothea is commonly held to represent George Eliot herself, as that of Celia is supposed to portray her sister Chrissey. These conjectures are no doubt true enough, but the idea that Casaubon, "that cursed white-blooded pedantic coxcomb," as Ladislaw calls him, is a delineation of Herbert Spencer can hardly be sustained. If he had successfully resisted her charms in those early *Westminster Review* days and come out unscathed or at all events undefeated from those moonlight encounters in the garden, she at least owed to him her association with George Henry Lewes, as, later on, she was to owe to him her marriage with J. W. Cross.

Some characteristics of Casaubon—his conceit, his grandiose delusions, his coldness, his sexlessness—may have been suggested by certain traits in Spencer, but I think it far more probable that Casaubon was a synthetic representation, a *simulacrum* of those "philosophers and theorists" to whom she had paid such deep reverence and whom she was now finding out were hardly worthy of the pedestal to which in her naïve enthusiasm she had exalted them.

Middlemarch, George Eliot tells us, "was received with as much enthusiasm as any of her former books, not even excepting *Adam Bede.*" Commercially it was a great success. She had made a handsome sum by *Romola,* she made a still handsomer by *Middlemarch.* But a great part of this success was due to the momentum of her reputation. Now that Dickens and Thackeray were dead, she had no serious rival to contest her claim to be considered the greatest living English novelist. People therefore now bought her books, as they used to buy the latest volume of Tennyson, as a few years ago they bought the newest Hardy. "The immediate success of *Middlemarch,*" says Sir Leslie Stephen, "may have been proportioned rather to its author's reputation than to its intrinsic merits." But it brought her in twelve thousand pounds and won her much praise.

At the beginning of April, 1870, George Eliot and

Lewes are again in Berlin. Their reception there was flattering, overwhelming. "We have seen many and various men and women," she writes to Mrs. Congreve. "If I had been in good health, I should probably have continued to be more amused than tired of sitting on a sofa and having one person after another brought up to bow to me and pay me the same compliment. . . . One enters on all subjects by turns in these evening parties, which are something like reading the Conversations-Lexicon in a nightmare." These flattering but rather tiresome entertainments are varied with others more to her taste. She goes to the opera for Gluck and Mozart and hears *Tannhäuser* for the second time, and there are some fine orchestral concerts to be had for sixpence. She notes the growth of luxury in Berlin and laments that it is only here and there that one gets a glimpse of the old-fashioned German housekeeping. They go to the Reichstag and hear Bismarck speak. She came home weary and depressed. Continually through the long journey she had suffered from small ailments which told upon her spirits. "These small bodily grievances make life less desirable to me," she confesses sadly, "though every one of my best blessings—my one perfect love, and the sympathy shown towards me for the sake of my works, and the personal regard of a few friends—have become much intensified in these latter

days. I am not hopeful about future work. I am languid and my novel [*Middlemarch*] languishes too."

Then came a visit to Oxford, the first view of which she found rather disappointing, but turning through Christ Church into the meadows, she found the scene "beautiful to her heart's content." At Oxford they are the guests of Mark Pattison and his wife, by whom they are conducted after tea to the croquet ground near the Museum, meeting Sir Benjamin Brodie on the way. Next day, Mrs. Pattison takes her for a drive "in her little pony carriage round by" Haddington and by Littlemore where she sees "J. H. Newman's little conventual dwelling." Returning she had "a fine view of Oxford towers" still, in those days "breathing the last enchantments of the Middle Age."

Then came the great catastrophe, the Franco-Prussian War. "I am sorry," she says in a letter to Madame Bodichon, "for the sufferings of the French nation; but I think these sufferings are better for the moral welfare of the people than victory would have been." Her sympathies are at first predominantly with the Germans. Their "homage" had not been bestowed in vain: "Whatever charm we may see in the Southern Latin races, this ought not to blind us to the great contributions which the German energies have made in all sorts of ways to the common treasure of mankind." But that

victory which would have been so injurious to the French was clearly not very salutary to her friends the Germans. "In the beginning," she says, "I could feel entirely with the Germans, and could say of that calamity called 'victory'—I am glad. But now I can be glad of nothing. No people can carry on a long fierce war without being brutalized by it, more or less, and it pains me that the educated voices have not a higher moral tone about national and international duties and prospects." At Shottermill, near Haslemere, whither they now go to spend some delightful weeks, she and Lewes sit alone of an evening in the seclusion they love, with old prints for their dumb companions—"charming children of Sir Joshua's, and large hatted ladies of his and Romney's." But though she reads aloud—"almost all the evening—books of German science and other gravities," poor unhappy France has a full measure of her sympathy. Brookbank, where they stay, is a cottage belonging to Mrs. Gilchrist, the wife of Blake's biographer, and there she says they live "like two secluded owls, wise with unfashionable wisdom."

"George is gloriously well and studying, writing, walking, eating and sleeping with equal vigour." For once this inveterate Londoner is happy away from London, delighting in a country beautiful with "perpetual undulations of heath and copse, and clear views of hur-

rying water, with here and there a grand pine-wood, steep wood-clothed promontories, and gleaming pools. And here the work, the novel that was to be *Middlemarch* goes on slowly but surely taking shape. Her letters at this period contain few references to visits from friends and acquaintances, but in a letter written on the twenty-fourth of July to Blackwood she says: "Tennyson, who is one of the 'hill-folk' about here, has found us out." Later on, when they took their country house at Witley they were to see a great deal more of him.

In August she enters into an interesting correspondence with a Scottish admirer of her work, Alexander Main, who had written asking her about the correct pronunciation of Romola and who was subsequently to be responsible for a collection of extracts from her work entitled *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings, in Prose and Verse; selected from the works of George Eliot.* A passage of great interest occurs in one of her letters to Main. It concerns Scott and runs thus: "I like to tell you that my worship for Scott is peculiar. I began to read him when I was seven years old; and afterwards when I was grown-up, and living alone with my father, I was able to make the evenings cheerful for him during the last five or six years of his life by reading aloud to him Scott's novels. No other writer would serve as a sub-

stitute for Scott, and my life at that time would have been much more difficult without him." It is remarkable how most of those who praise Scott do so in almost identical terms. In how many of them is love of Scott interwoven with memories of childhood and home. Cardinal Newman, for example, tells us that he had a "devotion" for him, and related how "in bed of an early summer morning when the birds began to stir and the first rays of the level sun came stealing in through the windows he would lie and read *Waverley* or *Guy Mannering* till it was time to get up." And quite recently a prominent English statesman and a former prime minister speaking at a Scott Commemoration Banquet confessed that his love for Scott dated from the time when, a boy of nine, he read or declaimed in his solitary walks passages from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* There is greater poetry than that which tells how

> "The stag at eve had drunk his fill
> Where danced the moon on Monan's rill
> And deep his midnight lair had made
> In lone Glenartney's hazel shade."

Yet for many of us those lines threw wide the gateway to the Land of Romance and for that reason are cherished by us with a strangely intimate affection. Scott is part of the fiber of our being and without him life would not be "more difficult," but unthinkable.

It is a matter for surprise that notwithstanding her whole-hearted admiration and love for Scott, she should have profited so little by his example in the treatment of historical subjects. If she had realized that in order to succeed in that sphere of composition it is necessary to choose a subject already more or less familiar in advance she would never have selected the life and times of Savonarola as her theme, a theme in which she had to instruct not only the reader but herself. In this she made the same mistake as Flaubert in *Salâmmbo.* Of that work, and still more of *Romola,* one may say in the words of a *grande dame* of the seventeenth century, *c'est beau; mais c'est ennuyeux!*

On November 4, 1872, she writes to Alexander Main, saying: "I have finished my book ('Middlemarch'), and am thoroughly at peace about it—not because I am convinced of its perfection, but because I have lived to give out what it was in me to give, and have not been hindered by illness or death from making my work a whole, such as it is. When a subject has begun to grow in me, I suffer terribly until it has wrought itself out—become a complete organism; and then it seems to take wing and go away from me. *That* thing is not to be done again—that life has been lived."

The public reception of *Middlemarch* was highly gratifying. "No former book of mine," she notes in her

Journal, "has been received with more enthusiasm." It was long since the Leweses had any material cares to occupy them, and now they are not merely well-off but rich and not merely rich but happy. "Mr. Lewes's health is just now untroubled, and with those who are nearest to us all is well."

In May, 1873, they pay a visit to Cambridge and in the following month to Oxford where Jowett does the honors. F. W. H. Myers, at whose invitation they went to Cambridge, has set down in his *Modern Essays* the following record of the visit: "I remember," he writes in the impressive almost hierophantic style which he never laid aside, "how at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellow's Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet call of men —the words God, Immortality, Duty—pronounced with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law. I listened, and night fell, her grave, majestic countenance turned towards me like a sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise

and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates. And when we stood at length and parted, amid that columnar circuit of forest trees beneath the last twilight of starless skies, I seemed to be gazing like Titus at Jerusalem, on vacant seats and empty halls—on a sanctuary with no Presence to hallow it, and heaven left lonely of a God." That is grand, and one is reminded of the graceful solemnity which marks the same writer's style when he is narrating the encounter of Æneas and the Cumæan Sibyl. George Eliot herself would appear to have been more or less unconscious of the profound effect her words and manner exerted on the sensitive mind of Mr. Myers, for this is how she refers to her visit. "We were invited ostensibly to see the boat-race, but the real pleasure of the visit consisted in talking with a hopeful group of Trinity young men." In point of fact the passage quoted gives a wholly distorted impression of George Eliot, than whom no one was ever less "Sibylline." "I have no antagonism towards any religious belief, but a strong outflow of sympathy. Every community met to worship the highest Good (which is understood to be expressed by God) carries me along in its main current and if there were not reasons against my following such an inclination, I should go to church or chapel constantly, for the sake of the delightful emotions of fellowship which come over one

in religious assemblies—the very nature of such assemblies being the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse."

The visit to Jowett took place at the beginning of June. On the twenty-third they started for the Continent. They went with an itinerary or list of places to visit which they took with them as some people take books with them on a holiday, that is without the smallest intention of looking at them. Instead of Grenoble, the Grant Chartreuse and Aix les Bains and so on, they went to Plombières and Luxeuil and reached Nancy just as the Germans were quitting it. Tricolors and paper lanterns, singing and cheering and general rejoicings save among the German troops who were sorry to bid farewell to so delectable a place of sojourn.

On their return to England they go to a house named Blackbrook near Bickley which they had taken as a temporary refuge from the interruptions inevitably incident to town life "which break up the day without any adequate result of good to any mortal. In the country the days have broad spaces, and the very stillness seems to give a delightful roominess to the hours." There is a singular felicity about that phrase "the days have broad spaces and the very stillness seems to give a delightful

roominess to the hours." It is an example of that creative use of words which Mr. Herbert Read tells us is the distinguishing characteristic of poetry, a characteristic, however, for which we look in vain in *The Spanish Gypsy* or in any other of her poems.

Meanwhile *Middlemarch* continues to be a great success. Mr. Bancroft, the American Minister at Berlin, writes to tell her that everybody in Berlin is reading it. He had to buy two copies for his house and he found the Rector of the University, "a stupendous mathematician," occupied with it in the solid part of the day. It would have been even more convincing to learn that the students were occupied with it in the non-solid part of the day. Thus their bark glides smoothly over a halcyon sea. "The happy old year," she writes on the first day of the New Year (1874), "in which we have had constant enjoyment of life, notwithstanding much bodily *malaise,* is gone from us for ever. More than in any former year of my life, love has been poured forth to me from distant hearts, and in our home we have had that finish to domestic comfort which only faithful kind servants can give. Our children are prosperous and happy,—Charles evidently growing in mental efficiency; we have abundant wealth far more than our actual needs." In fact all the attributes assigned by the poet to venerable old age—honor, love, obedience, and if

not troops of friends at least a choice group of loyal and affectionate spirits.

Home, the Priory, seemed to adopt her phrase about itineraries to be "a place to wander from." May, 1874, which saw the publication of a volume of verse, *Legend of Jubal and other Poems,* found them in a country cottage at Earlwood which they had taken for four months. There, she delights in the *secura quies et nescia fallere vita,* the good that comes to soul and body from "the sweet breezes over hill and common, the delicious silence, and the unbroken spaces of the day." And again, "We are revelling in our country peacefulness, in spite of the chills and the rain . . . every day . . . finding new beauties of this loveliest part of a lovely country." While London is sweltering in a heat-wave, they never had more than an agreeable sunniness. "I am uniformly cheerful now," she exclaims, "—feeling the preciousness of these moments, in which I still possess love and thought." Then after a spell at home, intersected by a journey to the Ardennes, they take a house at Rickmansworth, "a fine, old, brick, Georgian place, with a lovely bit of landscape." But it was not yet time to relinquish work. A new book on a large scale is agitating her mind. She had drawn on her memories of childhood and adolescence for *The Scenes of Clerical Life,* for *Adam Bede* and for *The Mill on the Floss,* history,

politics, philosophy and sociology for *Romola, Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch,* but there was another subject that lay near to her heart, and that was the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. The hardships, the injustice, the sufferings endured by the Jewish race had long filled her with sorrow and indignation. Now she would champion their cause and sing aloud their praises. Such is the inspiration of the last and longest of her novels. She was in fear and trembling lest it should fall short of the excellence achieved in *Middlemarch.* Her apprehensions were well founded. I think I got through every word in *Daniel Deronda* once. I should be unwilling to attempt the feat again. Mr. Arnold Bennett said the other day that he would not reread *Westward Ho* again for one hundred pounds. I am not rich enough to refuse to enter for such tests of endurance, and in the reading line I would attempt much for the sake of one hundred pounds. But I should draw the line at *Daniel Deronda.* One of the apologists of this book, adopting the rôle of *advocatus diaboli,* puts the case for the prosecution with some vigor. "I have become tired and sick," says this writer, "of hearing that the characters are unreal, that there is not such a man or woman in the story whom you can take away with you and live with. I know that Daniel is thought to be a prig, and the Jew Mordecai a bore; that Gwendolen

is thought impossible and Grandcourt a stage villain; that the language is held to be strained and uncouth, full of far-fetched tropes and metaphors drawn from unfamiliar science. It is said there is no motive power in the action, no reason for the characters behaving as they behave. . . . Would a handsome young Englishman brought up as a Christian at a public school or University be suddenly overjoyed to find that he was a Jew? No; in 'Daniel Deronda' thought and learning have usurped the place of art. It belongs to the worst type of all novels, a novel with a tendency. . . . Biological studies have ruined her fine sensibility. George Eliot has passed her prime. As in the 'Transfiguration' of Raphael, we see in 'Deronda' the downward movement of a great mind, a movement which, if followed, would have disastrous effects upon the national literature." This of course is palpably and purposely exaggerated, it is out-Heroding Herod, and the Devil would have had good reason to be displeased with so impulsive and incautious an advocate. Yet I could subscribe to it much more readily than to the case for the defense which the same writer proceeds to put forward. " 'Daniel Deronda,' " he claims "is one step further upwards in the career of a soaring genius who was destined, if life was spared, to achieve greater heights than any to which it had yet risen. It is the result of the normal

and regular growth of unrivalled powers which were ever seeking subjects more and more worthy for their exercise. It is as superior to 'Adam Bede' as 'Hamlet' is to 'Much Ado about Nothing.' It is an effort to realize the highest purposes of art, to seize the strongest passions, the loftiest heights and the lowest depths of human nature."

We can not agree that her soaring genius was ever seeking subjects more and more worthy. The fact was that her *genius* had ceased to be operative. Her achievements after *The Mill on the Floss* may be likened to an engine that draws its freight long after the steam has been shut off and draws it far because it is running downhill. George Eliot with her enormous and multifarious load of learning, the weighty and miscellaneous product of her immense reading was like such an engine running along and drawing its load by the power of its own momentum. Gwendolen Harleth is no doubt drawn with charm and subtlety as are all George Eliot's women, and the story of her marriage is powerfully done. All this may be allowed, and yet I think it is none the less true that had George Eliot written nothing but *Daniel Deronda,* nay if she had added to it *Romola, Felix Holt* and even the more popular *Middlemarch,* her reputation would not have survived to this day, not even in a state of suspended animation. I dislike *Daniel*

Deronda for its own sake, with the deep-rooted instinctive dislike entertained by those who find themselves in antipathy to Doctor Fell, but I dislike it no less because, being a painful example of gifts misapplied and overloaded with futile theories, it tends to cast a chilling shadow over the radiance of those works in which her real genius was surely and triumphantly displayed.

One event in 1875 should be recorded. On October tenth of that year she makes this retrospective entry in her Journal: "On the 15th June, we went to a house we had taken at Rickmansworth. Here, in the end of July, we received the news that our dear Bertie had died on June 29th." That is all; it is brief enough. The waters of Lethe have passed over the heads of both these children, and like the foam flakes on the billows in mid-ocean they are as if they had never been. Of what his fortunes had been, in his distant place of exile, of what had brought about his untimely death, not a word.

A little later, and there comes back for a brief space into her life, like a spirit from the land of the dead, some one, long ago loved and honored, whose name had not been mentioned, or whose memory recalled, for many a year,—one who had watched over her with love and jealous care in those distant years which marked her passage across the frontier that divides childhood from womanhood. How many and how affectionate

were the letters exchanged between Marian Evans and Miss Lewis, her governess at the Misses Franklin's school at Coventry! Then, suddenly as it seemed, the interchange of letters came to an end. The paths of the pupil and the governess diverge and "the rest is silence." At last after many years, the pupil, now a famous writer, and the governess, an old woman in the late evening of her days, come together again and once more renew the ancient ties.

"I wonder," writes George Eliot to Sara Hennell, "if you all remember an old governess of mine who used to visit me at Foleshill—a Miss Lewis? I have found her out. She is living at Leamington, old, but cheerful, and so delighted to be remembered with gratitude. How very old we are all getting! . . . The approach of parting is the bitterness of age."

From time to time a sort of impersonal sadness descends upon her and a vague weariness, a nostalgia, a yearning for stillness and repose. "Death," she says rather mournfully, "is the only physician, the shadow of his valley the only journeying that will cure us of age and the gathering fatigue of years"—and then as though to fortify her resolution to fling off her melancholy she adds, with a rather forced air of gaiety: "Still we are thoroughly lively and spry."

CHAPTER XXII

In December, 1876, the Leweses buy a house in Surrey. "We think of it," she writes in her Diary, "as making a serious change in our life—namely, that we shall finally settle there and give up town." One motive for taking this house, perhaps the determining motive, was that it was near Weybridge, their friendship with the Crosses having ripened into an affectionate intimacy. The house, which was a charming one, was known as the Heights and was situated at Witley near Godalming. "It stands," says J. W. Cross, "on a gentle hill, overlooking a lovely bit of characteristic English scenery. In the foreground green fields, prettily timbered, undulate up to the high ground of Haslemere in front, with Blackdown (where Tennyson lives) on the left hand and Hind Head on the right.—'Heights that laugh with corn in August, or lift the plough-team against the sky in September.' Below the white steam-pennon flies along in the hollow. The walks and drives in the neighborhood are enchanting. A land of pine-woods and copses, village greens and heather-covered hills, with the most delicious old red or gray brick timbered cot-

tages nestling among creeping roses—the sober-colored tiles of their roofs, covered with lichen offering a perpetual harmony to the eye." The house stood in eight or nine acres of pleasure ground and gardens, and their life here, if quiet, was on the dignified scale that demands abundance of money and a sufficient domestic staff. Here at Witley they entertained but few friends, but those few were charming and distinguished. Sir Henry and Lady Holland lived hard by. Mrs. Greville had a house between Witley and Godalming. The Tennysons, the Du Mauriers and the Allinghams were all within easy reach. It was a pleasant and a secluded life —not idle by any means, for she was still an eager and diligent reader, and still unable to lay aside the pen, she had begun to write her last book, a series of essays—mingled memories and reflections—which she called *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such.* Nevertheless, all is not well. Lewes' health is a source of anxiety. Perhaps he missed his London and felt the depression that descends on the busy man who gives up work.

In June, 1878, they are back at the Priory and dine at Mr. Goschen's, where they meet the Crown Prince and Princess of Germany and sit at the same table with the Dean of Westminster, the Bishop of Peterborough, Lord and Lady Ripon. Truly nothing succeeds like success, and wealthy and famous, they find themselves fel-

low guests with royalty and bask in the benevolent smiles of dignitaries of the Establishment.

At rare intervals there were little *diners intimes* at the Priory—never more than six people. One memorable evening Tennyson was there, and after dinner, with George Eliot seated at his side, he intoned *Maud* in his splendid hierophantic way. But Lewes does not mend. He has to diet for gout, he suffers from nightly cramps and inward *malaise.*

At Witley, whither they had escaped again, autumn was upon the hills, and the woods were weeping their burden to the earth. The shadow of approaching winter was drawing nearer and nearer. And upon her spirit brooded another shadow, the shadow of some vague foreboding, she knew not what.

George Henry Lewes had been one of those delicate beings alert in mind and frail in body, of whom people are wont to say "it is only his spirit that keeps him up," and though he was continually ailing, his good humor never flagged. One tenet at least of the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius he had completely mastered, and that was to be "cheerful in all circumstances, even in sickness." "Nothing but death," said J. W. Cross, "could quench that bright flame. Even on his worst days he had always a good story to tell; and I remember on one occasion, in the drawing-room at Witley, between two

bouts of pain, he sang through, with great *brio,* though without much voice, the greater portion of the tenor part in the 'Barber of Seville'—George Eliot playing his accompaniment and both of them thoroughly enjoying the fun."

Lewes was a born actor (it was in his blood) and played all his parts, however varied, with an equal zest. Nor was he the less of a play-actor in those parts in which he seemed most serious. His gravity, no less than his fun, was equally play-acting. For him the world was indeed a stage, a brilliant, crowded and vastly entertaining scene with a motley company playing their several parts in the drama called Life. The stage itself was full of light and color, the wings, the entrance and the exit were wrapped in shadow. Whence he came and whither he would go he knew not. No matter, the great thing was to play one's allotted part—great or small, grave or gay—with a good heart. Full of tact and resource, never gloomy, never bored—or at least never appearing so—generous, indulgent, always ready to make allowances for others, always eager to do another "a good turn" never was there a man more versatile. Play-writing, play-acting, journalism, philosophy, zoology, psychology, mathematics, music, painting, poetry—in all these things he was either a practitioner or a very competent theorist. His charm was irresistible,

no one could be dull in his company. The pompous laid aside their pomp, the lofty came down from their heights, the timid forgot their fears. He would romp with the children, discourse gravely to the learned and gently to the old. He was equally at home acting charades with his boys, talking science with Huxley or philosophy with Spencer; and—rare combination—he was rich in imagination and common sense. Business matters he would transact with efficiency and dispatch. He was a sort of buffer state between George Eliot and the world, with all its petty cares and vexations. He shielded her from trouble and annoyance and warded off whatever he deemed calculated to becloud her serenity or depress her spirits. He never spared himself where her happiness or her comfort was in question. Above all he suffered the star of his own ambition to be quenched that hers might shine with a brighter radiance. He loved his London, he loved busying himself with his microscope and his specimens, but without a murmur he quitted the former and packed away the latter whenever the silence of the country or the seashore or the excitement of travel became insistent with her. Some there are who would say that he had done a very good thing for himself, and taunt him with living, and living very comfortably, on the moral (the highly moral) earnings of a woman. They forget or ignore one

vital fact; and that is that, had it not been for Lewes, there would have been no George Eliot but only Mary Ann Evans the translator of Strauss and the writer of a few negligible articles in the *Westminster Review*. Charles Hennell had not the spark to set her genius ablaze, nor Chapman, nor Herbert Spencer nor any other mortal save that strange little gnome of genius, George Henry Lewes. That George Eliot knew well enough if the world knew it not. As the years went on she leaned on him more and more. He was her world. Without him? . . . She dared not contemplate what life would be without him.

It was in November, 1878, that Death came and "plucked him by the sleeve familiarly." He had been ailing as he had often ailed before, but suddenly the burden of pain was lifted, and he felt all the exhilaration, all the buoyancy that never failed to come back to him when he had sent the demon of suffering to the right-about. He rose and went out for a drive; came back and got through a lot of arrears of business, overtaxed his strength and took a chill. Followed feverishness and the usual headache. Somehow things look serious. George Eliot is apprehensive. Sir James Paget comes at her summons and reassures her. The actual trouble will soon be allayed. Next day he looks in again with Doctor Quain. They both pronounce him "better

in all respects." Three days later he died. He has made his last exit. No more gibes, no more gambols. He has done now, with those flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar. This Yorick—or was he Figaro?—has enacted his part and passed out into the shadows.

And George Eliot—what of her! For weeks she sat alone, dazed and inconsolable in the desolate house, or wandered aimlessly through its silent chambers. "Here I and sorrow sit," she wrote in her Diary on the day that marked the opening of the New Year. Bereavement she had known before—mother, father, sister, she had laid in the tomb—but never sorrow like to this. An immense silence seemed to have fallen like a pall upon her and upon the world. Her face was drawn with grief, an intolerable burden weighed upon her spirits. She read no letters and wrote none. The remorse that visits us when we have lost those whom we hold most dear, the feeling that we have not loved them as we ought, that, in moments of petulance or impatience we have uttered words which it is now too late to recall,—all these thoughts came flooding in upon her. She remembered the love he had lavished upon her, his patience, the tender foresight with which he had anticipated her every need, the generosity with which he had sacrificed himself and subordinated his own desires, his

own ambitions, to hers—and now it was too late—too late to make amends. Was there nothing to be done, no act of *pietas* she could perform to still the insistence of her grief and add a halo to his memory? One task at least she could fulfill. The work on the completion of which he had set his heart, the *Problems of Life and Mind,* lay unfinished on his desk. To the conclusion of that task, the arrangement of the final chapters and the correction of the proofs, she would devote whatever energies she could summon up.

Gradually she masters her grief. Countless letters had reached her after Lewes' death. She had left them unopened. Now when the flood of sorrow had begun to subside, she takes heart a little.

To her friend Madame Bodichon she writes, some six weeks after Lewes' death: "I bless you for all your goodness to me, but I am a bruised creature, and shrink even from the tenderest touch."

John Blackwood writes—a little inopportunely perhaps—inquiring about the progress of *Theophrastus Such,* and there is a letter from J. W. Cross praying to be allowed to see her. "Some time, if I live, I shall be able to see you," she replies, "—perhaps sooner than anyone else—but not yet."

Cross wrote again at once—there was a touch in that letter of hers—asking what day he might come. But

this is altogether too fast. Patience, Mr. Cross. "When I said 'some time' I meant still a distant time," she replies. "I want to live a little time, that I may do certain things for his sake. So I try to keep up my strength, and I work as much as I can to save my mind from imbecility. But that is all at present. I can go through anything that is mere business. But what used to be joy is joy no longer, and what is pain is easier because he has not to bear it." But a week later there are signs that the chilling frost of her grief is going to relent. A milder breeze seems to be stealing across the cold gray landscape, a hint, almost a promise of returning spring. "I do need your affection. Every sign of care for me from the beings I respect and love, is a help to me. In a week or two I think I shall want to see you." Finally, on the twenty-second of February, this: "If you happen to be at liberty to-morrow, or the following Friday, or to-morrow week, I hope I shall be well enough to see you. Let me know which day." That meant, and she knew he would so interpret it, "Come to-morrow." She was not deceived.

"On Sunday the 23rd February," notes J. W. Cross, "I saw her for the first time." The die was cast. From that time her interest in life began to return, her spirits to revive. She had thought of founding a studentship at Cambridge in memory of Lewes, and Henry Sidg-

wick calls to discuss the matter with her. Then Michael Foster came on the same errand and proposes that Huxley, Pye Smith, Thistelton Dyer, Francis Balfour and Henry Sidgwick should be appointed as trustees. Then Gertrude—Charles' wife—comes and brings the three children to have tea with Grandmamma, and the sound of baby laughter is heard again in the house that had so long been stranger to such music. Then "Mrs. Congreve came again" and Mrs. Burne-Jones, and Mr. Bowen (afterward Lord Justice Bowen), Mr. Spencer—"and J.," which last entry is significant.

Blackwood was still importunate about *Theophrastus Such;* importunate and a little obtuse. It was necessary to tell him plainly. "I think you will enter into my feeling when I say that to create a notion on the part of the public of my having been occupied in writing 'Theophrastus' would be repugnant to me." Blackwood might publish, but it must be made clear that the book was written before, and not after, Lewes' death.

What feelings were at work within her, or what event had befallen that on the twenty-second of April she writes thus to "J":

"I am in dreadful need of your counsel. Pray come to me when you can—morning, afternoon, or evening."

"From this time forward," J. W. Cross records, "I saw George Eliot constantly. My mother had died in

the beginning of the previous December—a week after Mr. Lewes; and as my life had been very much bound up with hers, I was trying to find some fresh interest in taking up a new pursuit." So he began to study Italian, reading the *Inferno* with the aid of Carlyle's translation. "What are you doing?" George Eliot inquired of him one day. He told her. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I must read that with you!" And so, together, side by side they read through the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* "not in a *dilettante* way, but with minute and careful examination of the construction of every sentence. The prodigious stimulus of such a teacher (*cotanto maestro*) made the reading a real labor of love." Nor was the labor lost. "The divine poet took us into a new world. It was a renovation of life." Not that Lewes was forgotten. There was the Cambridge studentship as a memorial, and the four volumes of his *Problems*. But Dante had intervened. Together John and she had traversed the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. The sequel seemed inevitable. And it was. "Accustomed as she had been for so many years," says J. W. Cross, "to solitude *à deux*, the want of close companionship continued to be bitterly felt. She was in the habit of going with me very frequently to the National Gallery, and to other exhibitions of pictures, to the British Museum sculptures and to South Kensington. This constant associa-

tion," continues Mr. Cross, who seems entirely to have lost his taste for banking, "engrossed me completely and was a new interest to her. A bond of mutual dependence had been formed between us. On the 28th March she came down to Weybridge, and stayed till the 30th; and on the 9th April it was finally decided that our marriage should take place." Dante, the National Gallery, the British Museum, South Kensington! Not precisely the primrose path to the Hymeneal altar.

CHAPTER XXIII

GEORGE ELIOT had long since come to hold an exalted and securely established position in the popular imagination. She was regarded as one who, greatly daring, had clung with devotion to her principles. Even if those principles were held to be fallacious and injurious—or, in theological language "sinful"—the loyalty with which she had adhered to them, the high seriousness of her character, her genius, her culture, her grave and melancholy expression, the dignity and gentleness of her bearing had somehow combined even in the minds of the strictest and most orthodox of moralists to free her conduct from offense. If she had erred, she had erred (it was thought) from lofty motives, and the main circumstance of her private life was generally ignored, and where it was not ignored was not so much condemned as deplored. There was a touch of idealism, of grandeur about her union with Lewes that placed them in that company of great lovers in which the names of Paolo and Francesca, Abélard and Héloïse shine out with bright but melancholy luster. Her books were freely admitted into the family circle; they were regarded as eminently suitable for Sunday reading. Her

association with Lewes was not, of course, discussed in the hearing of the younger members of the family; but the parents looked upon it as affording an example of conjugal felicity not always conspicuous in unions sanctioned by the Church. If she had erred, and persisted in her error, no one had ever erred with a greater regard for decorum, and when later on it was known that she had mixed with bishops and deans, with princes and princesses, nay that the Queen herself—the very type and exemplar of British respectability—had read and approved of her books, the seal was finally set upon her reputation. Her place was secure.

When, therefore, after the period of silent hopeless grief, after the foundation of the physiological studentship as a pious memorial to her dead companion, it became known that she was about to marry, and to marry a man many years her junior, the general public were surprised, bewildered, shocked. It is as though, supposing she had survived her lover, Francesca had married a prosperous merchant or banker of Rimini—save that in this case the lady had not the excuse of youth. No wonder then the public looked upon this second alliance, lawful though it was, as a moral decline, a *déchéance.* Stories began to go the round. Was it true that . . . and that . . . ? And so on. With all these hints and whispers we need not worry our heads. The

essential point is that she loved Lewes not merely intellectually and spiritually but very humanly indeed; that Lewes both awoke and fed the flame of a passion which, continuing to burn, was sublimated into creations which, having "no drowning mark upon them, still ride triumphantly upon the river of Time."

And now it became necessary to break the news to the circle of her friends and acquaintances. To one she writes: "I have something to tell you which will doubtless be a great surprise to you; but since I have found that other friends, less acquainted with me and my life than you are, have given me their sympathy, I think that I can count on yours. I am going to do what not very long ago I should myself have pronounced impossible for me, and therefore I should not wonder at any one else who found my action incomprehensible. By the time you receive this letter I shall (so far as the future can be matter of assertion) have been married to Mr. J. W. Cross, who, you know, is a friend of years, a friend much loved and trusted by Mr. Lewes, and who, now that I am alone, sees his happiness in the dedication of his life to me. This change in my position will make no change in my care for Mr. Lewes's family, and in the ultimate disposition of my property. Mr. Cross has a sufficient fortune of his own. We are going abroad for a few months, and I shall not return to live at this

house. Mr. Cross has taken the lease of a house, No. 4 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, where we shall spend the winter and early spring, making Witley our summer home." To Mrs. Congreve she writes a brief note, telling her of the "great, momentous change" that is going to take place in her life. Further details she will learn from Charles who "will call on you and tell you what he can on Saturday."

And now comes the wedding. Of course it will be held in church. What she had conceded to her father she would not withhold from John. The ceremony took place at St. George's, Hanover Square, and Charles was there to give the bride away, and a few friends and relations including of course the Misses Cross. They go back to the Priory to sign their wills and then take train to Dover en route for France. The crossing and the subsequent journeying was heaven to her. Life seemed to smile on her now as it had never smiled before. "We had a millennial cabin on the deck of the Calais-Douvres, and floated over the Strait as easily as the saints float upward to heaven." She felt herself now at any rate, "right with the world." It is a comfortable feeling and calculated, when one is rich and famous to boot, to stimulate the assurance that "God's in his heaven." Now, too, at long last, came the reconciliation with her brother Isaac. He wrote to her, and the letter was

forwarded to her at Milan. "It was a great joy to me," she said in her reply, "to have your kind words of sympathy, for our long silence has never broken the affection for you which began when we were little ones." Tom and Maggie were again united.

Amid all this "chapter of delights" as she calls this life of hers, did her thoughts ever revert to him who in former years had been the companion of her wanderings? Or was his image growing faint and blurred to her inward vision. "I had but one regret," she writes to Charles, "in seeing the sublime beauty of the Grande Chartreuse. It was that the Pater had not seen it. I would still give up my own life willingly if he could have the happiness instead of me." It was perhaps as well that to this Laodameia the celestial powers forebore to show their pity.

Returning at length to London, the Crosses take up their residence at their beautiful house in Cheyne Walk. By this time "the books had all been arranged as nearly as possible in the same order that they had occupied at The Priory, Mr. Radermacher of the Pantechnicon having given his personal attention to this arrangement. . . . We continued [says her husband] reading aloud Max Müller's 'Lectures on the Science of Language' and Duffield's translation of 'Don Quixote.' We were also reading 'Hermann and Dorothea,' Tennyson's last volume of poems, just published, and Mr. Frederic Myers's

volume on Wordsworth. In the evenings we had always a little feast of music . . . On the afternoon of Friday the 17th December we went to see the 'Agamemnon' performed in Greek by Oxford undergraduates. The representation was a great enjoyment—an exciting stimulus—and my wife proposed that during the winter we should read together some of the Greek dramas." Alas for the vanity of human resolutions! The following afternoon they went to a Saturday Popular Concert at St. James's Hall. The air was hot, and George Eliot let the cloak she was wearing slip from her shoulders. Her husband, "conscious of a draught, . . . begged her to resume" her cloak. "In the evening she played through several of the pieces" they "had heard at the concert, . . . with a touch as true and as delicate as ever."

Next day she had a slightly sore throat, but it was nothing. She got up to breakfast, and in the afternoon received her Sunday visitors as usual. Herbert Spencer was among them. He had come to bring sad news, the death of Sir James Colvile. When the guests had gone she sat down at her writing table and began a letter to Lady Colvile's sister, Mrs. Strachey. She wrote a few sentences worded with all the old unerring grace and touching charm. Then she felt she could go no further. A sudden incomprehensible weakness took possession of her. "The pen," says her husband, "which had carried delight and comfort to so many minds and hearts, here

made its last mark. The spring, which had broadened out into so wide a river of speech, ceased to flow."

Next day, Monday, the doctor came and diagnosed laryngeal sore throat. Nothing so very alarming, but why that weakness, that sensation of collapse? On Wednesday Sir Andrew Clark was called in consultation, and the region of the heart was found to be the seat of the malady. The doctors were at her bedside. "Tell them," she gasped in an agitated whisper to her husband—"I have great pain in the left side." And then she became unconscious. It was the end. At ten o'clock that same night—it was the twenty-second of December, 1880,—George Eliot breathed her last.

One week later, on the twenty-ninth of December, on a bitter day of sleet and snow a little procession sets out from Chelsea and slowly makes its way northward to Highgate Cemetery where two years before Lewes had been laid to rest. Into that same grave all that remains of George Eliot is lowered—the dripping clay is shoveled back on to the coffin. The wind sighs drearily through the graveyard grass. The mourners take their last farewell. But if the words of the poet are true, concerning those who have loved greatly, then surely the heart that had sojourned alone for two years in that dark and narrow house was not unconscious of her coming.

CHAPTER XXIV

It is an obligation upon us that, if we hold a definite opinion upon a given subject, we should seek about to find a basis for it. That is a duty we owe to ourselves, and if we not only hold but publish our opinion it is a duty we owe to the world. Nevertheless it will, I am afraid, be found that the assurance with which we advance our opinions is too often in inverse ratio to our ability to explain them.

But perhaps, after all, that need not alarm or even surprise us, for in point of fact the reasons we advance for our opinions are seldom the real ones, however successfully we may convince ourselves and others to the contrary.

Many years ago, a French writer of genius proclaimed a doctrine that involved him in considerable trouble with an eminent critic of the day. "There exists," said Anatole France, in the preface to a collection of his own critical contributions to *Le Temps,* "no objective criticism, any more than there is objective art, and all those who flatter themselves that they put anything else but themselves into their books, are the dupes

of the most fallacious philosophy. The truth is that one never emerges from oneself." Monsieur Brunetière, in whom this repudiation of objective criticism excited a lively indignation, arguing that the senses convey practically similar impressions of nature to all men, so that what is round for one man would not be square for another, and that the functions of understanding operate in the same manner, if not in the same degree, in all minds, which is the origin of common sense, based his criticism on universal consent. To this Anatole France replied that "this consent, although sufficient to form and maintain society, is not sufficient if it is a question of establishing the superiority of one poet over another. It is beyond doubt that men resemble each other sufficiently for them all to find the requirements of their existence in the markets and bazaars of a great town; but nothing is less probable than that two men in the same country have an absolutely similar impression of a particular line of Virgil." If then, we take this view of it, criticism is found to be what Anatole France had described it in that earlier page to which Monsieur Brunetière had taken such violent exception; criticism is, in short "a sort of Romance designed for those who have sagacious and curious minds, and every romance is, rightly taken, an autobiography. The good critic [thus he sums the matter up in a memorable passage]

is he who relates the adventures of his own soul among masterpieces." This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter: we like what we like, and dislike what we dislike, because we are what we are; because you are you, and I am I. As for analyzing and penetrating the secret of that infinitely complex agglomeration of atoms which makes up the *ego* of each one of us, where is he who would set his mind to such a task? Criticism then, that is to say one's attitude toward a given author, is a personal thing, depending on a multitude of subtle and obscure influences deep down in our being and utterly beyond our power to catalogue or express in words. Nevertheless, if one can not define, one can hint at, the kind of thing one has in mind. For my own part, then, I love George Eliot, as I love Scott, because long ago, in my childhood, when my mind was much more open to impressions of beauty than it is now, I read her, or rather heard her read to me, by my father by the fireside of a winter's evening. Thus it comes about that Scott is not only Scott, nor George Eliot only George Eliot; they are my father and mother, and the firelight and the shaded lamp and the red table-cloth and the pictures on the wall of that old house and an infinity of other half-forgotten things too shadowy, too elusive to put into words. Whence it results that though others may love Scott and George Eliot with a love as

great, and an understanding far transcending mine, no one can love them in the same way or for the same reason.

Nevertheless there are, I think, in spite of Anatole France, one or two canons of criticism that may legitimately be laid down. How we love an author may indeed be a personal and an incommunicable question. *Why* we love an author and whether that author is worthy to be loved is a general and more definable matter.

Quod semper, quod ubique, et quod ab omnibus is as good an indication of the worth of a book, as it is of the soundness of a doctrine. If a work is dependent for its acceptance not on the accidents of a particular time or epoch, or in certain places or among certain nationalities, if its appeal is not limited to certain classes or conditions of men, as for example the rich or the poor, the learned or the unlearned, but engages the interest and excites the love of men of every time, every place and every condition, if it has received the universal *imprimatur,* that book is regarded as a classic. Not but what a classic may have its variations of fortune by reason of the changing taste and temper of successive generations as they pass. But though they may be temporarily neglected, or obscured by some predominant interest of the day, they sooner or later emerge from

the cloud and shine anew with all their pristine luster. Judged by this test, *Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner* are classics. Their appeal is not circumscribed by time or place, nor limited to class or coterie. Their message is to all, their public is humanity. Some one has said, though who and where I can not recall, that in good writing, you hear the author talking to you. You are aware of his presence, you behold his countenance. Flaubert, we all know denied this and aimed at totally concealing his own personality, but he did not succeed, and his own works supply the plainest confutation of his doctrine. Over the whole of them broods the presence of their author, as the sky overhangs the sea and determines its changing hues.

"The many," says a great master of English prose, "use language as they find it, the man of genius uses it, indeed, but subjects it withal to his own purposes, and moulds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, aspirations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners and history, the exercises of his wit, of his humor, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and

throbbing of his intellect, does he image forth, to all does he give utterance, in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself, and analagous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality attending on his own inward world of thought as its very shadow: so that we might as well say that one man's shadow is another's, as that the style of a really gifted mind can belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as* a shadow. His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal." All that is a glorious amplification, a magnificent unfolding of the idea which Anatole France had in mind when he declared that "every romance is, rightly taken, an autobiography." It is what Sir Leslie Stephen means when, in speaking of George Eliot, he says that we shall best arrive at an understanding of that quality "which gives the permanent interest of her works . . . by regarding them as implicit autobiography."

In that "implicit autobiography" then lies the charm and the power of the writer, and therein is the test by which he must ultimately be judged. Once the personality of a writer has succeeded in impressing itself on the vast mass of his readers, the position of that writer is secure. Neither devouring Time, nor even Mr. Arnold Bennett, can thrust him from his seat. George Eliot is one of those elect spirits. It is good to be in her

company. There is a glow upon the path; the scent of the fresh clean country is in the air. The people with whom she makes us acquainted, we have learned long since to know and to greet like old and familiar friends. Their forms and lineaments are distinct and real to us. The kitchen and the dairy at the Hall Farm, the scene in the carpenter's workshop when the evening sun comes streaming in at the open door and the workers are preparing to go home, Parson Irwine seated at the chess-board with his mother in the dining-room at the rectory, the music of the swift stream at Dorlcote Mill where the rush of the water and the booming of the Mill, bring a dreamy deafness, which seems to heighten the peacefulness of the scene . . . a great curtain of sound, shutting one out from the world beyond,—these and a hundred other beautiful images, visions of an England, of a mode of life which though they have vanished like the shadow which passeth away and returns not, yet live in those gracious and immortal pages invested with a beauty that can not die. Such scenes are a possession to us for ever, transcending the worth of gold and precious stones, for who can tell what hidden and incalculable influence such visions of remembered beauty—ageless and unfading because rapt beyond the reach of Time and Change—may have upon our lives,

purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought.

And then, passing from the scenes, to the men and women by whom they are inhabited—what a gallery of deathless creations—Mrs. Poyser, Bartle Massey, Parson Irwine, Squire Donnithorne and his godson Arthur, Mr. and Mrs. Glegg and the rest of the company of aunts and uncles, Mr. Macey and the whole immortal company assembled that tempestuous night in the warm bar-parlor of the Rainbow Inn.

It is true that the whole journey is not so entertaining as this. When we leave the fields and the hedgerows, there is not the same lightness in our heart or in our step. Our companion, whose speech hitherto was so clear, so fresh, so limpid, so gentle, so sparkling, becomes heavy, turgid, difficult to understand, like the language one hears in lecture halls or at congresses of the learned. The skies grow overcast, and she with whom we have been faring, though her step flags not, presses onward with determination rather than with pleasure, walking with the quick steps of overwearied folk. Such, to put it in a mildly allegorical form, is the change that comes over George Eliot after *The Mill on the Floss* had been given to the world, when she ceased to draw her inspiration from the memories of childhood and her early home.

Matthew Arnold speaks somewhere about the desirability, the duty, of making ourselves acquainted with the best that has been said and thought in the world. It was not illogical in him to extend the principle so as to include an acquaintance with the best people. The only difficulty is to judge which people are the "best" and what they are "best" for. We do not look for perfection of breeding, for ease and charm of manner, for refinement of mind, and graceful accomplishments among professional men, or those whose lives are devoted to the advancement or dissemination of learning, still less should we expect to find these qualities among the members of a newly formed plutocracy.

If, having exhausted the sources on which she drew for her earlier novels, George Eliot decided to seek a further inspiration in the world of society, it is to be regretted that circumstances led her to look for it among professors and theorists. Huxley, Tyndall and Spencer are deservedly honored in the annals of scientific research and philosophic inquiry, but they do not lend themselves very readily to romantic treatment nor are their opinions and discourse easily assimilable into the conversation of general society. In one book by another author these and other august figures (including the illustrious Doctor Jowett) are made to provide us with delicious and unfailing entertainment. The per-

sonages so happily brought together by Mr. Mallock in Otho Lawrence's country house to discuss the attributes of the Ideal State are never for a moment heavy or dull, or if dull they are, their very dulness is diverting. But *The New Republic* is confessedly a parody, and George Eliot would have deemed it sacrilege of the most unpardonable kind to seek in personages so august, material for satire or burlesque. It was her great misfortune that she knew too many professors and stood altogether too much in awe of them. Another, and a derivative misfortune was that she read too many books. She entertained an altogether exaggerated respect for *la culture livresque.* She came to read too much and dream too little. We do not know much about the habits of Shakespeare, but I do not suppose he was a great reader, save in the book of Life, nor, I fancy, is there any evidence to show that he ever traveled out of England, yet I imagine there is more of the true Italy in his *Romeo and Juliet* than in a whole wilderness of *Romolas.* Casaubon may be a fine presentation of the arid and futile scholar, but we would willingly barter him for Mr. Tookey, the deputy parish-clerk of Raveloe. Lydgate may be an admirable specimen of the high-minded provincial medical practitioner animated by laudable ambitions, but frankly I prefer Bartle Massey.

As an artist how are we to regard George Eliot?

Much depends on what we mean by the word artist. An artist, as I understand the word, signifies one who, knowing the potentialities and the limitations of the medium in which he works, employs that medium to the best effect that a consummate mastery of its technicalities will allow. He knows by experience and intuition what his medium can and what it can not convey. And strictly observing those limits he sees to it that the work performed within them is wrought to the highest perfection of finish. A great genius is not necessarily a perfect artist, and vice versa.

As an artist, Jane Austen is incomparably superior to George Eliot; as an interpreter of human life, as a reader of the human heart, she is immeasurably her inferior. But purely and simply as an artist her strength and weakness, her achievements and limitations were clearly brought out many years ago by a critic to whose name reference was made a few pages back: "We may compare her work," says Mr. W. H. Mallock, "not so much to so many separate pictures, as to so many separate canvases, each covered with a number of pictorial fragments—fragments connected together indeed by some thread, inward or outward, of thought or meaning; but neither in conception nor execution fused together into coherent artistic wholes. We have studies for some heroic subject—some great and solemn action—which

are instinct with power and genius, but in which the figures are grouped ill, and often only partly outlined; and we have this heroic group broken or surrounded by a number of semi-serious figures—not in outline, but painted in solid color, and with the most masterly and complete finish. Such at least is the impression which her earlier works have made on us." And then the writer proceeds: "Her manner latterly, it is true, has grown in some ways more congruous; but this is not because she has learnt to finish the whole of her pictures as she once did their secondary parts; but because she has ceased to use her brush at all, and has left the whole in the condition of shadowy sketches."

But such criticisms as these, however just and however interesting from the point of view of the literary technician, are not of paramount importance, and ending as I began I will repeat that George Eliot owes her abiding influence to the compelling charm of the grave, gracious and rather sadly humorous personality that interfuses her best and most memorable work. "From reading George Eliot's novels," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "we are influenced in the same way as by an intimacy with George Eliot herself. . . . We feel that the writer with whom we have been in contact possessed a singularly wide and reflective intellect, a union of keen sensibility with a thoroughly tolerant spirit, a desire to appreciate

all the good hidden under the commonplace and narrow, a lively sympathy with all the nobler aspirations, a vivid insight into the perplexities and delusions which beset even the strongest minds, brilliant powers of wit, . . . powers of mind and a richness of emotional nature rarely equalled."

We have compared her with Jane Austen and mentioned her in the same breath with Sir Walter Scott, but for a just comparison we must ascend higher still. In aspiration, if not always in achievement, in vision if not always in expression, she is of the kin of Shakespeare and of Sophocles, and her place is not far below the greatest of the world's elect.

THE END

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